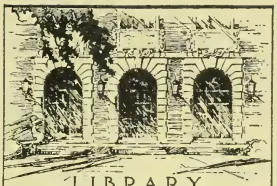

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THE MASTER OF MARTON.

VOL. III.

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THE MASTER OF MARTON.

"To thine own self be true."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
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CONTENTS

OF

THE THIRD VOLUME.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	AFFINITIES	1
II.	JESSIE COMES HOME	26
III.	MARTON NEWS	40
IV.	CAUGHT IN THE RAIN	57
V.	THE CONFLICT	69
VI.	BROTHERHOOD	88
VII.	SUNDERED	104
VIII.	DE PROFUNDIS	127
IX.	SUNDAY AT HOME	133
X.	THE OLD LOVE	148
XI.	IN WHICH MEG'S FEELINGS ARE HURT	157
XII.	WORTH IT ALL	168
XIII.	BETWEEN TWO WORLDS	184
XIV.	WHICH THE LIGHT READER WILL PROBABLY SKIP	192

CHAP. PAGE

XV. IN WHICH THE LIVING OF MARTON FALLS VACANT 205

XVI. MRS. DOUGHTY'S LODGER 222

XVII. THE WANDERER'S TALE 237

XVIII. WRONGS 261

XIX. "FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES" . . 283

XX. AT LAST 291

THE MASTER OF MARTON.

CHAPTER I.

AFFINITIES.

TO one who stood on the level banks of the Lyme at Marton, and watched its stream creeping lazily through the meadows, or who walked to the village on the dull high road from Bedesby, with nothing but hedgerows, trees, and fields to diversify the prospect, would have any idea, that not more than a dozen miles away could be a spot so wild and picturesque as the little hamlet of Scaurton-on-the-Moors.

The vale of Bedesby, in which Marton lay, was a long level hollow, stretching for many miles

along the course of the Lyme. On the east it was bounded by the low swell of the Wold hills, but on the west, some ten or a dozen miles from the village, by a range of black hills known by the name of Scaurfell Edge. This range formed the boundary, not only of the vale of Bedesby, but also of the county in which it was situated. Centuries ago, during the time of the feuds which raged perpetually among the petty princes of the Heptarchy, this strip of border land had been the scene of frequent strife between their hostile barons, the evidence of which might still be traced in the many ruined castles with which the rocky fastnesses were thickly strewn.

To one of these old castles, not very far from the aforesaid hamlet of Scaurton-on-the-Moor, it had been arranged, the evening that Janet and her father had dined at the Hall, that she and Alison, with Mr. Holdych to escort them, should make an expedition on the following day.

It was just one of those little impromptu plans which often yield greater pleasure than such as are laid out and looked forward to for a much longer period. The Canon was going to re-open a

church at a village in the same direction, and talking over the matter at dinner, the idea had shaped itself during the conversation. Alison had been once to the place, so that she could vouch for its being worth the trouble of visiting. But Janet, though so near, had never seen it yet, and as Mr. Holdych, too, declared himself desirous of exploring the neighbourhood in which he had come to reside, it was settled, as they chatted over dessert, that they should make the little excursion in company.

They were to lunch together at the Rectory, and start thence in a light open carriage belonging to Mr. Holdych. Carlsby, the Canon's destination, was about two miles short of Scaurton, so that they could set him down on their way, and then drive forward to the place they intended themselves to visit.

After that quiet starlight night there was not much fear of the next day's turning out unfavourably, and indeed it proved all that the little party could desire. The sun rose in that leisurely fashion which foretells a day of unclouded serenity when once he shall have fairly begun

his race. He shone out gradually as the morning mists cleared themselves away; and by the time that Janet drew aside the curtains and looked inquiringly from her green garlanded casement into the dewy garden, all was so sparkling, bright, and fresh, that she felt sure no mischance, from the weather at least, would occur to mar the pleasure of the day that lay before her.

The great calm was resting on her still that had folded itself around her the night before, and hidden away all shadow of unrest or doubt as she rode home beneath the quiet stars. No flutter of fear or anxious hope disturbed her breast, as she remembered that she should meet again so soon the eye that, but a few hours ago, had flashed strange light into her consciousness. It was pure unmingled gladness that she felt at the thought of the day they were about to spend together. What it might bring forth she did not ask. Enough that she was happy now.

It is always so. Real love is never fearful—never doubts. Only when there is a flaw in the gem does uncertainty or questioning arise. And though neither of them knew it perhaps, yet for long

past, in those frequent visits at the Priory House, Leonard had been drawing her soul within his own, linking to his every clasping tendril of her heart, by ties whose power now for the first time she felt.

Yet there was no want of frank simplicity in her voice or manner when she met and greeted him in the drawing-room of the Rectory. Nor was there any shadow of hesitation, only new light and strength in the bright brave look that rested for a moment round her, as she came forward and put her hand in his. They felt so sure, so safe, that they hardly needed now to tell what each already knew.

There were not many minutes to spare when lunch was over. The Canon's service at the new church at Carlsby was to begin at three; and though Mr. Holdych had a light carriage and a pair of excellent horses, yet it was a considerable distance to the village, and the road, when they got among the hills, would not be of the best.

Besides, even the most expeditious clergyman requires some small space of time to perform his toilette in the vestry, before appearing in the

church. So the Canon wisely gave himself twenty minutes' grace, and ordered the horses to be put into the carriage and all to be ready for starting, at least a quarter of an hour sooner than either Alison or Janet thought was absolutely necessary to have set off, in order to reach his destination at the time appointed.

"When you young folks are as old as I am," he said, as he mounted to his seat, "you will know the advantage of having ten minutes to spare. It makes a wonderful difference in patience and temper, and in a man's efficiency too. I never knew any one yet to get on well in the world, or to get comfortably through it, who was not in the habit of keeping a little stock of time constantly on hand, to draw upon as necessity required. And now let us be off."

Leonard touched his horses, and away they started, bowling merrily down the village, past the churchyard, past the green where the ducks were diving and dabbling in the pond, past the town-pump and the lawyer's house and Mr. Leaf's mill, away along the Haxby road, and then past tall hedgerows, and green fields thick with waving

wheat. Past meadows where the new-mown hay filled all the air with fragrance, while the sun-burnt haymakers rested for a moment on their forks and rakes to watch the carriage rattling by. Through the village of Haxby, and then through another, a few miles farther on. And now the road got steep and rough, and they began to drive more slowly. The green hedgerows were giving place to low fences of loosely-piled stones; the crops of wheat and hay grew scantier; the spreading elms and beeches that had lined the road disappeared, and were replaced by plantations of firs and larches which lay in black patches upon the sides of the hills. Behind them they saw now the vale of Bedesby spread out like a map, with the Minster towers just visible in the distance, and village spires peeping up here and there among the trees. And before them was the same unending stony road, twisting along up the hills till it brought them at last to Carlsby, where they set down the Canon at the door of the Parsonage-house. Then a few miles more rough driving along a rugged country road carried them over the top of the hill to the little

inn at Scaurton, where they had arranged to put up the horses and have tea.

A queer, old-fashioned looking place that Scaurton inn was, built of rude hewn stones, and fixed just at the foot of a huge crag which seemed perpetually threatening to topple down upon its roof. The door opened from the road into a wide low kitchen, with an open fireplace, where was a peat fire smouldering on the hearth. Across the ceiling stretched a long wooden rack, from which depended, what to Janet looked like dried skins of leather, but which proved to be in reality the oaten cakes which form a chief article of food among the cottagers of the district.

"It's very good, ma'am—better nor what it looks," said the landlady, reaching up her stout round arm, and breaking off a large piece from one of the cakes, which she handed round among her guests. "Folks generally eat a bit just for curiosity. It's a thing you don't see in towns; only here among the hills. But they're mostly soon satisfied. I daresay it's a thing you need to be brought up on to like it."

Janet took the piece offered to her and nibbled

a bit off one of the corners. But it was like trying to eat a slice of sandstone grit. She and Alison laughed at each other, and gave up the attempt in despair. Leonard, too, laid down the piece that had fallen to his share, at a loss how otherwise to dispose of it, and giving orders to have tea ready on their return, the little party set off to visit the castle.

The ruins stood on the top of a height about a mile away. It was a wild, romantic path along which they went, winding round the hill by a sort of natural ledge formed on its side. Far beneath them was a narrow gorge with a streamlet brawling through the midst, and above were steep sunlit slopes, purpled over with the heather, which just now was coming into bloom. They sauntered on, chatting gaily as they went, the happy careless nonsense which sparkles out among those who are thoroughly at ease in one another's company. Sometimes they lingered for a moment to watch a tinkling cascade come dancing down the hill, half hidden in the heather, or to gather a handful of the purple sprays, or watch the sunlight and shadow chasing each other over the distant moors.

By-and-bye, as they turned the shoulder of the hill, the scenery around them grew wilder, and the path more steep and rugged. Huge lichen-stained boulders lay heaped upon the heathery slopes, with clumps of black pines growing here and there in the hollows, or feathering the summit of the height. It was hard work now clambering up the path, and by the time they reached the foot of the crag on which were the ruins of the castle, Alison's strength, never very much to boast of, began to fail.

"Ah! who can tell how hard it is to climb," laughed she, sinking down on a smooth white slab, which jutted out conveniently from a heathery bank. "I really do not think I shall be able to drag myself up this terrible path. Do you go on, both of you, and I will stay here till you come back. I shall be quite comfortable. This is a most delicious little nook to rest in. Now, pray do," she continued, for Janet, seeing she would be seriously fatigued if she were to attempt the ascent, was begging to be allowed to remain with her, while Mr. Holdych went forward alone; "I know very well what this hill is, and indeed I

did not expect when we set off that I should manage to get to the top, only I would not say anything lest I should prevent you from going too."

Janet looked regretful still, and Mr. Holdych proposed that they should rest together for awhile, and then return by the way they came, contenting themselves with viewing the castle from below. But Alison, with playful persistence, urged her point.

"Do go," she said; "I would so much rather stay here by myself than keep either of you from going. It will really be as much pleasure to me to look out over the valley at my ease, as it will be to you to explore the castle. Besides, I should not enjoy myself in the least if I thought that I was keeping either of you from seeing it."

Janet did not oppose her further. She saw that Alison would be really hurt if they changed their plans on her account, so laughing a gay farewell, and turning often to look at her as she leaned back upon her heathery couch, she took the arm which Leonard offered to her, and began with his help to make the steep and slippery

ascent. But it was rough work, and even with her companion's help, Janet had some difficulty at times in keeping her footing upon the slippery fern and heather, or on the long wiry grass that lay spread over the smooth black boulders with which the brow of the hill was beset.

"It is worth the trouble, though," she exclaimed, when at length they reached the top; and leaning panting against a broken fragment of the castle wall, she gazed out eagerly upon the scene around.

Above them rose the grey, craggy keep of the castle, the only part that ruin had not shattered. All around were masses of broken walls, some standing alone in solid towers of masonry, others lying in long heaps of scattered stones, on which wild grasses waved and half concealed their rugged outlines. Here was a broken arch, choked up with heaps of rubbish, and here a gaping, vault-like chasm, curtained by a trailing bramble or festoon of ivy that was hanging over it.

A gloomy enough place it was, frowning there in the sunshine, which indeed, did but mark the desolation of decay. Janet shivered.

"One can hardly think," she said, "that these walls ever contained a home. They seem to tell of nothing but the strength of rude resistance which they once possessed. I can shut my eyes and fancy that I hear the shouts of besieging armies sounding from across the moat, or the sighing of prisoners out of these yawning dungeon caverns. Do you know, I think life could not have been a very beautiful thing in those days."

"As beautiful upon the whole, I daresay, as in these of ours," said Leonard, who was leaning with folded arms upon the embrasure of what once had been a window, and was looking out away from the dreary castle, on the valley that lay steeped in sunlight at the foot of the hill. "There is just as much selfishness and folly and brutality in human nature now as then. Only they did their quarrelling themselves, and did it on a small scale, and we do ours on a large one, and mostly by proxy. You see, when they fought, they would storm a castle and leave a score or two of dead bodies in the moat, while we have a 'glorious victory,' which means a thousand men

lying on the field with the life shattered out of them, and a thousand widows and orphans wailing at home. That is all the difference. But come here, Mrs. Clyde; the view from this side is magnificent."

Janet went, and standing by his side, looked out in silence on the wide-stretching scene that lay before them. Wild and rugged it was, yet not without gentler elements softening its grandeur into beauty. All around lay the purple moors, swelling on and on till the last faint outline faded into the distant haze. Here was a dark ravine fringed with a belt of ragged pines, or a streamlet glancing down the green face of a rock, or a sea of waving fern that had spread itself over some sunny bank. Hardly a sound was to be heard, save now and then the trilling of a lark in the blue cloud-dappled sky, or the whisper of the wind through the heather, or faint and far-off, the gurgle of the streamlet as it wound along in the valley below, dashing itself here and there into a torrent of creamy foam as it raged round some projecting rock that obstructed its course.

And this hush neither Leonard nor Janet cared to break. As they stood there side by side alone together, a voice, clearer than any speech, was telling out to each the secrets of the other's heart. That subtle affinity of soul, which, prisoned as all human beings are, does sometimes find leave to act, was drawing the two into a communion deeper far than any outer companionship could be. Philosophers may sneer if they will, and materialists deny a truth which they are unable to explain. But to most finely organized natures there come seasons when, for a while, the spirit seems to have escaped from this fleshly prison-house and to be trying its wings free and unfettered by the encumbrances of sense. Life seems to break away from its dull surroundings. It grows transparent, glorious, and beautiful. The mean disguises drop away, and souls akin by nature, strong in their purity and truth, feel without fear that they are known as what they are.

Leonard, standing thus within the circle of Janet's presence, speaking no word, not so much as holding her hand or looking into her face, for there seemed in that hour to be a sanctity

about her which nothing material might profane, yet read as in an open page her consciousness. He felt within himself that henceforth she belonged to him.

And round Janet, too, as she stood by Leonard's side, the same sweet confidence was folding. Through her whole being she felt a soft, slow pulsing, as of the sea beneath the summer moon. Listening in the silence to herself, she felt how supreme was the sway beneath which now her whole nature bent. Yet trembling through this delicious awe, mingling with it so that she could not discern the blending of the two, was that strange sense of oneness, that calm of measureless content which rests upon a woman once only in her life, when for the first time there steals over her the sense of mutual, overshadowing love.

To Janet now had come that moment, so perfect in its abandonment of care or thought, in its freedom from that unrest which a great love, once fairly recognised, so soon brings with it. She gazed out over the valley across to the purple crags beyond, seeing all as in a dream. Through

the stillness she could hear the faint babble of the rivulet as its waters plashed around the stones. It sounded to her like a veiled voice, singing in the silence, of a joy too vivid and intense to be a memory only, too blessedly near to be a hope. The long thirst was quenched at last. The half-filled heart was brimmed with love.

But even while they stood together thus, there swept over the great flood of joy rushing through Leonard's heart, a wild blast of doubt, that lashed it for an instant into a fury of unrest.

"Let us go," said he, suddenly; "Miss Birney will be tired of waiting."

And then catching the glance from her sweet upward eyes, the momentary tumult died away.

"Shall we walk round the castle once more?" he asked.

"Oh no," said Janet; "let us go back to Alison. I was forgetting her."

And as she spoke Leonard looked at her and smiled. He too, had been forgetting all but her.

Alison was still sitting on the heathery bank when they returned. She met them with a bright look of welcome.

"I have had a very pleasant hour," she said. "And you, did you enjoy the view when you got to the top of the hill? I knew you would, and it has been so clear, too. You would be able to see so far. And now will you rest awhile here, or shall we go to the inn and have tea?"

"We must go back!" exclaimed Janet in some surprise, as she looked at her watch. "I could not have thought it had been so late. Why, it is nearly six o'clock already! You must have been sadly tired, Alison, waiting so long."

But Alison only smiled; and rising, gathered up her little bunch of heather and led the way on the road back to the inn.

They were hungry, all three of them, by the time they reached it. Their long drive, the mountain air, and their hard climbing, made them by no means sorry to see the table in the parlour beyond the great kitchen, spread over with such bountiful providings as the little inn was able to afford. And a merry meal they had. Such delicious scones, such ham and eggs, such sweet wheaten cakes and heather-scented honey, as could surely nowhere else be found. True, they had

crockery of yellow delf, two-pronged forks and huge horn-handled knives, pewter spoons, and a teapot of nothing better than brown earthenware. But then they were in the mood for enjoyment, and the clumsier their implements the more they laughed as they used them.

Alison presided, for Janet declared herself too tired to undertake the responsibility. She filled the cups from the glazed teapot, and handed round the blue glass sugar-basin and the jug of clotted cream, with as much elegance and ease as though she had been sitting in state behind her own *recherché* equipage in the Rectory drawing-room, with its crystal and china, its crested spoons and glittering plate. But wherever Alison might be, she was always the same—graceful, gentle, self-possessed. Like a perfectly-tuned instrument, strike what chord you would, nothing came forth but sweetest harmonies.

"How pleasant it has been," she said, as they rose at last and prepared to depart. "We must come again some day when the heather is in full bloom, and make papa come with us. I am sure he would enjoy it."

"I am sure I have enjoyed it," said Janet, with a comical glance at the havoc they had made among the scones and honey.

"And I too," said Leonard, as he went out to pay the reckoning and see about the horses.

"Then we will settle it, Janet. It will be something to look forward to," said Alison; "and I will persuade papa some fine day to let his brain lie fallow for awhile, and we will come all of us together. What a lovely ride home we shall have! Look, Janet, how the clouds yonder are getting themselves ready for the sun-setting."

"So they are," responded Janet, looking through the window towards the west. "And a sunset among the hills is such a glorious sight. Our day is not quite ended even yet, Alison."

Alison was right. By the time they had reached Carlsby and taken up the Canon, who was waiting for them at the Parsonage-house, the distant hills that had been sleeping in the still evening air were all aflame. The broom and heather glowed like fire upon the swelling moors, and sinking in a flood of amber light, the sun went down behind a pile of purple clouds. Then the grey hues of twilight fell

upon the scene, and, as if by mutual consent, the party lapsed into silence. A little longer, and they found themselves once more at Marton. The church-clock was just striking nine as they drove up the village street. Its rough, sonorous clang made a sudden stir of sound in the quiet air. It shook up the drowsy daws, who had got their heads tucked comfortably under their wings, and were composing themselves to sleep in the crannies around the battlemented top of the grey old tower. And all down the street it brought out to the doors careful mothers, roused by its repeated strokes to the remembrance that stray members of their vagrant broods were not yet safely housed in bed.

Leonard set down Alison and the Canon at the Rectory-gates, with many warm farewells and thanks from both. Then he turned his horses' heads, bade Janet exchange the little seat which she had shared with Alison behind, for the more commodious one in front, and set off again to drive her home.

"We will go through the wood," said he; "it is pleasanter than by the road."

And stopping at the Lodge, he got the key of the five-barred gate from the old man, who came hobbling out from his seat by the fireside at the sound of the carriage-wheels. He drove on more slowly than he had done before, for now that he and Janet were again alone together, he was in no great haste to reach their journey's end. It was quite dusk among the shadows of the tall pines and cedars. As they passed the Hall the lights shone warmly out between the trees. Leonard turned aside and looked at it as they drove by. Janet followed his glance.

"What a difference you have made in the old place!" she said. "No one would have supposed, a year ago, it could have become such a pleasant home."

"I made it so for you," he answered, in a tone that thrilled through to Janet's heart. And as he spoke he turned and looked down upon her.

Janet's eyes fell before him, and even through the twilight gloom he could see the flush that mounted to her face. He said no more, only took in his, one of the little gloved hands that lay folded softly together, and told the rest to it. It

lay there quietly. Leonard knew that he had won his wife.

He reined up his horses at the gate of the Priory House garden and set Janet down. But long after she had passed out of sight down the shrubbery walk, he remained with his arms folded on the top of the gate, and his eyes fastened on the spot where the light figure had disappeared from sight. He might have stood there until the round yellow moon, which was just rising behind the yews, had crept up far above their tops, had not a sudden stamp and an impatient pawing from one of the horses brought him back to the consciousness of waking life. He drew himself up from the gate, shook back his shoulders as if to rouse himself from his absent mood, and turning to the horse, stroked down the creature's glossy neck and gathered up the reins into his hand. Then, seating himself in the carriage, in another moment he was driving rapidly towards the Hall.

Bayard, like a sensible brute, stopped of his own accord before the high black gates that opened on to the broad path leading round to the stables.

Leonard, when alone, generally went in this way. He liked to see his horses disencumbered of their harness and led away in peace to rest and oats. It was a good opportunity, too, to hear from Gideon Smailes, the *chef d'affaires* in the stable-yard, who had been from time immemorial in the service of his uncle, and now had been transferred to him, an account of the various events which had transpired within his jurisdiction. The old man was full primed this evening with an important piece of intelligence. He had learned during the day that Captain Lewin, of The Oaks, a retired officer, who had married a rich old wife and settled down in comfort on her jointure, was about to sell his bay mare, Esther. And Gideon had more than once heard his master express his admiration of the creature's points. But, to his surprise, the news was received with coolness, not to say indifference. The old man tried another track.

"They don't seem to ha' made much 'count o' their run," said he, as he rubbed down Bayard's broad flanks. "It'll be a matter o' twelve mile or more to Scaurton, an' bad road too

when you get among the hills; awful it is for a hoss, an' as bad coming down 'em as it is going up. But, Lor' bless you! sir, why, they'd do it over again to-night if you was to set 'em to it, an' make nowt of it. They're in prime fettle, they are that; why, I believe they'd go from everlasting to everlasting, an' be as fresh at the end as they was at the beginning."

"I shall want Bayard to-morrow to go to Bedesby," said Leonard; "you must have him in the dog-cart by nine o'clock." And then, to Gideon's disappointment, for he always reckoned on these occasions on having at least five minutes' chat with his master, he walked at once out of the yard into the house.

CHAPTER II.

JESSIE COMES HOME.

THAT was a high day at Roger Lee's house, on which Jessie was expected to return to Marton. The old lady with whom she lived had dropped off quite suddenly, like an over-ripe nut from its bough, only a few days after Roger had been that evening to supper at the mill.

Jessie had stayed on for awhile after the funeral was over, until the family should have settled down again and recovered from the stir which the event had caused in the household. It was not long, however, before things resumed their usual course. The death of the very aged and infirm makes but a momentary gap among the survivors, which soon closes up and leaves but little trace be-

hind of the life that has long been slipping away from that of the world. For a little time, there is the solemn shadow, the empty room, the black garments. Then all is over, and the memory of the dead is laid away, like unused apparel in a drawer.

The bulk of the old lady's property was left to the nephew with whom she had lived since her husband's death. The rest was in trifling legacies to old servants and charitable institutions. To Jessie, however, was bequeathed a more considerable sum than to the others. She had a hundred pounds left to her, in remembrance, as the will said, of the patient care with which, during her mistress's illness, she had attended upon her.

There was left to her also a huge old-fashioned silver watch, the size of a miniature warming-pan, and twelve silver teaspoons, towards beginning housekeeping. All these were put into Jessie's possession by her master; five pounds were added by himself to her wages, over and above the sum due to her, and then, taking with her the goodwill of all, she started one

bright summer morning on her homeward journey.

She was to reach Bedesby by the four o'clock train on Wednesday afternoon. Roger did not go back to the smithy that day after dinner, but dressed himself in his Sunday best, put the horse into the spring cart, and set off from Marton a little after two, to meet her at the station.

It would not take more than an hour to drive, for Bedesby was scarcely seven miles away, and the horse trotted famously in the light cart. But Roger was anxious to take time by the forelock. He had the notion that setting off soon would somehow shorten the time, and supposing he had to wait half an hour or so at the station, why that would be better anyway than being five minutes too late.

Marget stood at the door to see him off, and then turned back into the house to wash up her dinner things, and put back the plates and dishes into the empty places in the delf-rack. She still did all her work herself, though they had prospered in life since Jessie had left, and could afford, if they chose, to keep a servant now.

But Marget could not bear the idea of having a girl to look after. She "kenned brawly," she said, "that it wouldna be any saving of trouble to her, for she couldna expect a girl to do a' things to her liking, and she should only be fashed wi' trachling after her."

So Marget continued to scour that kitchen-floor of hers till you might have eaten your dinner off the smooth red tiles, and to polish her furniture with bees'-wax and "elbow grease" till everything shone again, and to bake her own girdle cakes for her husband's tea, just as she had done in the old days of their early married life, when it was all they could do, by dint of hard labour and sparing, to make both ends meet, to say nothing of getting them to tie.

It does not take long to wash up the dinner things for two people, and Marget had got all done before the hand of the great painted clock that ticked so loudly in the corner, had pointed to the hour of three. Roger could not be back with Jessie before five at the soonest, but Marget for once could not settle down, even to her knitting, which she always had lying about, handy to take

up at odd times and work at a bit when she could be doing nothing else.

She dusted the bright kitchen carefully from end to end, laid out a white table-cloth from the drawer to be ready for tea, and then went upstairs to Jessie's room, to take a final look around, and see that there was nothing wanting which could by any possibility have been forgotten.

It had never been called anything but "Jessie's room," though it had so long been empty. There was the little white bed, the low chest of drawers, with the looking-glass standing on the clean dimity cover, the checked curtains, with the box of mignionette outside the window, just as it used to be when Jessie was at home. Only the old carpet was taken away, and a new bright piece laid in the middle of the floor, and on the bed was spread Marget's best coverlet. It was of patchwork, elaborately quilted, and the bright variegated stars formed a kind of hieroglyphic chronicle of Marget's early history. Each one recalled some circumstance connected with it. This pink one with the white spots was her wedding gown, and this a bit of poor

little Easie's best frock, when she was a little thing, just beginning to toddle alone. And there were the Sunday gowns of one and another of her young companions in that far away Scottish village where she was born. And these delicate, quiet little patterns were bits of the dresses her young mistress took with her when she went out to India, and here was a bit of one of Master Leonard's frocks, for in those days, before the time of Manchester mills, a printed cotton had a value of its own, and was not considered to be fit only for servants' wear. And the quilt was prized accordingly, being spread out only on Sundays,—for Marget had brought with her to England her Scottish reverence for "the Sabbath," and was careful to manifest it by these and the like observances,—or on special occasions like the present.

There was a pot of flowers on the chimney-piece, clove-pinks and roses, sweet-brier and balm, which Marget had gathered in the morning while the dew was on them still; and a larger one in the fire-place, with a great bunch of feathery asparagus and gillyflowers. But every-

thing in the little chamber had been already so scrupulously arranged, that not even Marget's keen eye was able to detect anything that might need her hand, not even so much as a speck of dust upon the little oval mirror, which, nevertheless, she wiped down again with the corner of her apron and settled in its place.

The white blind was drawn partly down, for the sun came hotly upon that side of the house these bright June days. All round the edge ran a leafy tracery, formed by shadows cast from the rose and ivy leaves that clustered round the casement. No artist could have made a prettier decoration than this of nature's own design.

"She was aye fond o' those shadows," thought Marget, as she drew the blind a little farther up and fastened open the casement. "I mind of her showing me them once when she was a wee bit bairnie, an' spiering at me what it was made them come there. She'd aye a gleg e'e for aught that was bonnie, had Jessie. She was like our poor little Easie for that."

Marget was just coming out of the room, when she heard a rap at the door below. It was Mrs.

Leaf, who knew that Jessie was expected home that afternoon, and had brought with her in a basket a jug full of thick cream from her own dairy.

"I'm not going to stay," she said, as she set it down on the dresser; "only I had to come down this way, so I thought I'd just bring a drop of cream with me, for Jessie to taste of when she gets back to the country. It 'll be something new to her, will dairy cream, I dare say, being in London so long. It's a thing as they never have a sight of there."

But Mrs. Leaf had a more important errand on hand than to bring the cream. She was wanting them all to go down to the mill to tea on Sunday afternoon.

"I wouldn't have asked you of a Sunday," she said, "only you see it's the only day our master can sit hisself down comfortable. He's that worrety about the men in the mill if he's away from them more than half-an-hour at a time. I tell him sometimes it's not worth living at such a price. Why there isn't a man about the place but can sit down to his victuals in peace,

and him the master and doesn't do it. But however, it's to no use talking. It's in him to think as nothing can go on right without him. It's in the family—Reuben's just the same."

Marget would not quite promise Mrs. Leaf that they would go. She must hear first what Roger said, and if he was willing, they would all come on to the mill together after preaching.

Mrs. Leaf knew pretty well, however, from Marget's manner, that she was inclined to come; and, of course, if she was, Roger would be so too. She did not tell Marget that Reuben was to come over from Haxby to tea as well, though that was the secret of her wish to have them on Sunday rather than any other day. It would be better not, she thought, so she sat a few minutes longer chatting about Jessie, and then took her leave.

When she was gone, Marget put on a great linen apron, turned up her sleeves, and began to mix some girdle-cakes for tea.

"It isna many girdle-cakes she's seen in Lunnon," she said to herself as she put in an extra allowance of currants and spice. "Sic teas as they have there. Twa three bits o' bread and

butter as thin as a sixpence, an' aiblins a plate o' water-cresses or biscuits. You might almost as well have nothing ava as sic a tea as that. And she was aye fond of her tea, was Jessie. She likit fine sitting a wee over it, an' having a crack wi' her uncle." And Marget rolled out her cakes, baked them to a bright rich amber hue, and then laid them on the top of the oven to keep hot against the travellers arrived.

This done, she cleared away the traces of her cooking and proceeded to set the table for tea. She brought out the round deal table, covered it with the white cloth, and reached down and dusted the best china from the corner cupboard. She got out the cut-glass sugar basin and the white-hafted knives, which were never used except on extraordinary occasions. Then she went upstairs, put on her Sunday cap and gown, and taking her knitting in her hand, stood just within the open doorway, so as to be ready to catch the first glimpse of the green spring-cart when it turned out of the Bedesby road into the village-street.

It came at last—old Dobbin trotting rather

slowly now, though he quickened his pace as he began to smell his stable. It was a pretty good journey to Bedesby and back, and though Jessie was but a light load, there was a tolerably heavy box at the back of the cart.

Another moment and Roger had pulled up opposite the gate, and Jessie, without waiting for him to get down and help her out, had sprung to the ground, and was fast locked in Marget's arms.

"Oh, dear aunt!" she cried, with her eyes full of happy tears, "to think I should be at home again! At home, really at home. I never mean to leave you again. To think I have been so long away; and it seems only like yesterday since I went, and everything just as it used to be. Here's the big bush of southernwood, and the roses all in blow. Oh, how sweet the air is, after the London smoke!"

They all went into the cottage together, Roger and one of the men from the smithy coming behind, bringing in the great trunk between them.

"I haven't come back empty handed, uncle," said Jessie. "There's lots of things in that box. We must have it unpacked after tea, and you shall see what's in it."

"Ay, ay," said Roger, "we'll unpack it, hard enough; but so as you've brought yourself back, it's small odds what you've brought beside."

"Get off your bonnet, bairn, an' let's see what like you are," said Marget. "Come your ways here. You mind the way to your ain room. It isna sae big as the one you had in London, but it's blyther by far. The tea winna be lang afore it's ready, an' you'll be ready for it, I'll warrant. It's a gey journey you've had the day."

Jessie ran upstairs and came down presently as fresh and trim as the red rosebud she had fastened in the bosom of her frock.

"Now then, uncle," she exclaimed, as she danced into the kitchen, too glad-hearted to keep her gaiety down. "Take a good look at me. It's a long time since you've had such a chance."

"Bless the girl," said Roger, as Jessie clasped round him as far as her little arms would go and reached him up a kiss. "Hoo bonny she's grown, an' as good as she's bonnie. She doesn't think shame of her old uncle wi' being so long among quality folk."

"I should think she doesn't," said Jessie with a

merry laugh, as she leaned down her head on Roger's red waistcoat. "Quality are all very well, but there's nobody like your own kin. I feel like as if I was cushioned round with kindness on every side. I hardly know how to be happy enough." And she gave a great sigh of content, and nestled her head yet closer into the smith's big sheltering bosom. She could tell out more in that way than by talking, and in this first glad hour of return, poor Jessie could not find ways enough to express all that was brimming in her heart. It had been pent in so long while she had been obliged to act a staid responsible part as her mistress's attendant, and now it could hardly find its way out fast enough.

Roger did not speak, only stroked down with his big brawny hand the bright golden hair, and looked into the smiling face, with eyes moistened with a happy dew. It seems a provision of Providence that these huge bodies shall often house very tender hearts. Their very strength seems to increase their gentleness. There was not a child in the village but would put its little hand in that of Roger Lee, even when his face was

blackened by the smithy smoke, and would trot along contentedly by his side if he chanced to fall in with it as he was going down the street.

Jessie lifted her head at last. Marget was coming in with the teapot in one hand and a plate of girdle cakes, hot and fragrant, in the other.

"Oh, aunt, you have got girdle cakes! It looks like being at home. I've never seen a girdle cake all these years."

"I thought as much," said Marget, setting them down on the table. "That garred me bake them. They dinna ken how to make teas in Lunnon, sic fusionless way as they have there. Noo, Roger, we're a' ready. Let us sit down. Jessie 'll be glad of something to eat, sic a journey as she's had."

CHAPTER III.

MARTON NEWS.

THEY drew around the table, Jessie in the place she used to occupy of old.

"It comes quite natural," she said, as she sat down in the high-backed elm-wood chair by her uncle's side. "I might never have been away at all. My hand just went out of itself to reach in the chair, as if it had remembered where it always stood."

Roger bent down his head and said grace. The few short words were at all times a genuine act of devotion with Roger Lee. But to-day the usual formula seemed all too strait for his abounding thankfulness.

"Bless the Lord," he exclaimed, as he looked

round again. "He's given us honey to wer bread to-day, and wer cups running over. Here's all things richly to enjoy. I feel like as th' auld man might when he had his fatted calf killed, an' telled 'em they was to eat an' be merry, the day as he got his son back home again. Jessie, lass, thee doesna know what thee took from us when thee went away to Lunnon. I wonder noo how we framed to let thee bide there so long."

"Well, you've got me safe back now, uncle," laughed Jessie. "You need not trouble about bygones any more, for I don't mean ever to leave you again."

"Not while some one comes to fetch you, eh, Jessie?" said Roger, with a sly twinkle in the corner of his eye. "I doubt we should stand nobbut a poorish chance o' keeping of you if so be it was some one you'd a mind to go with."

"Noo dinna plague the lassie," said Marget, who was pouring into the cups a rich allowance of Mrs. Leaf's cream. "Ye ken brawly, Roger, Jessie doesna like sic daffin."

Jessie only smiled, however, with the easy unconsciousness of one too heart-whole to be in

any way affected by her uncle's implied insinuation.

"Nay, nay, uncle," she said, as she passed him his cup; "there's no fear of that. I've brought all away from London that ever I took with me. I used to lose myself often when first I went. The streets puzzled me so. Such a many of them turning one out of the other, worse a deal than Bedesby. But I never lost anything else. I haven't, indeed, for all I stopped so long. What cream this is of yours, aunt; you wouldn't see any to come near it in London. Our milk wouldn't rise it."

"I should think not," said Roger. "It stops over long at the pump for that, to say nothing of the chalk and stuff as gets putten in. But this cream seems better nor common. Where didst thee get it, Marget?"

"It's fra Mrs. Leaf's dairy. She come here with it this afternoon, just afore I started wi' the cakes baking, an' said it was a wee drappie she'd brocht with her for Jessie, just to let her see that we could give her something in the country as she couldna get in the town. She's wanting us

a' to go there on Sabbath, after preaching, an' have tea wi' them. However, I wouldna promise. I said I wad just wait while you got back an' see what Jessie said, an' if she wasna owre tired wi' her journey, aiblins we might."

Jessie did not feel particularly pleased at the prospect of taking tea at the mill on Sunday. She would rather, she thought, have had it cosily at home as they were having it now, with nothing to hinder her from talking her fill with her uncle and aunt.

Jessie had always liked the miller, but even now she was not without an uncomfortable remembrance of Mrs. Leaf's coldness to her, and of the gossip about herself and Reuben, which had been the secret cause of her leaving Marton so hastily. All that was over now though. If she had done nothing else by going away, she had at least come back wondering how she could ever have allowed herself to have been made so miserable by things that did not trouble her now the least in the world.

"How are they all getting on at the mill?" she inquired, without alluding to the invitation. "I haven't asked after them yet."

"They're getting on fine," said Marget. "He fails some, though, does old Mr. Leaf. He is asthmatic, ye ken. Last winter he was laid up wi' it three weeks an' mair. It's bad for him, the dust o' the mill. But Mrs. Leaf's as fresh as ever she was. You'd think, to look at her, she was as young as her daughters. An' her hair wi' not a streak o' gray in it, for all she's aulder than me by twa three years."

"Ay, she carries her age wonderful, does Mrs. Leaf," said the smith. "You see, she's such a little un, an' done up so neat. I allays says little folks lasts longer and keeps their looks better nor what big uns does. There's less on 'em, and it takes less to keep 'em going nor what it does big folks like me."

"Why, you needn't say that, uncle, for you look just as hearty as ever you did. But I'm sorry about Mr. Leaf. And Reuben—how's he? Is he at Haxby yet?"

"Ay, he's there now; but his lease 'll be out come Michaelmas, and he's coming back to t' mill then. His father's going to give him up t' business. It 'll be t' best thing t' auld man could do.

He's enough to live on, an' more too; and Reuben's never settled rightly at yon place at Haxby. He wasn't like to when he knew from first going that he shouldn't stop i' the place. There's been a Reuben Leaf, miller, of Marton mill, for the last hunder year an' more, an' in course Reuben knew that his father wouldn't be the last o' the name. Not as he was in a hurry to stand in his father's shoes. He's been a good lad, has Reuben, an' dutiful allays to his parents. It's a pity he's gotten so taken up wi' them Stabler girls. There's one on 'em he goes with constant. A great trapseing lass she is, more like a show girl than a sweetheart for a young man like Reuben."

"He'll no marry her," said Marget, disdainfully; "I ken Reuben better nor that. He'll aiblins daunder after her a wee whilie. He's no just sae steady as he was, an' they say she sticks to him like a burr; but he's no sae doitit as to make her his wife. He's owre muckle sense for that."

Jessie's heart gave just a little thump against her side, and then went on as steadily as before. What was it to her if Reuben had got a sweet-

heart? She didn't care about him a bit. She knew she didn't, and yet she felt just the least wicked little touch of satisfaction at the thought, that Miss Julia Stabler, whoever she might be, seemed, according to account, to be by no means a paragon of female perfection.

Her love had died down long ago, like a plant pinched by frost, as she thought, never to spring up again. Yet a twig or two of something like jealousy remaining still above ground, showed that the old root was not quite dead. What woman, not altogether an angel, was ever yet honestly willing to give up to perfect happiness with another, the man whom once she had loved? Not Jessie, I am afraid, though she was, on the whole, about as loving and as loveable a little creature as you would anywhere meet with.

She did not, however, stop just then to analyze her feelings. Perhaps, if she had, she would have been but little wiser after the process. To read one's own consciousness without mistake is a harder thing than most people imagine, and Jessie was not very learned in the science of psychology. She only said, as if it had just

that moment occurred to her to make the inquiry—

"And the new squire, aunt? What a thing it's been for Marton, his coming! Uncle's been telling me about the chapel. He's given them the ground."

"Ay, and letten us have it for nowt," cried Roger, pausing as he was conveying his saucerful of tea to his lips. "I couldn't believe myself when he telled us we was to have it free gratis for nothing. Noo it was like a gentleman, was that, an' he made as if we wasn't beholden to him a bit. Says he, 'I believe you Metherdisses does your duty both to God an' man, for I hear a good karacter in the village of all as belongs to you, an' I think it's nobbut right to give a help to them as helps theirselves.' An' wi' that he just puts out his hand as if he'd say, Haud your whisht, an' don't bother me with your thanks. Noo, there's a many if they'd ha' done a thing like that, would ha' looked to ha' had you bowin' an' scrapin', an' makin' your obedience. But there's nowt o' that in t' squire. He'll give a sort of a nod,

ay, to t' poorest man he meets, if he happens to know ought about him. It's my belief the folks hereabouts looks up to him a deal more for him not looking down on them."

Roger broke off here to finish emptying his saucer, and to supply himself with a fresh triangle of girdle cake. Marget took up the unfinished tale. The squire's excellences formed a theme on which she and her husband were never weary of expatiating. Moreover, in Jessie they had an auditor comparatively fresh to the subject, so that there was the pleasure of telling all over from the very beginning of his residence in Marton.

Jessie's home correspondence during her long absence had not been very extensive. She had written herself regularly once a fortnight, as often as the day came round. Her aunt had all the letters tied up carefully with tape—two or three tolerably thick bundles of them laid away in the top drawer in the walnut chest. But Marget herself was no "scholar," nor Roger either, so that to them the construction of a letter was a task of no ordinary magnitude.

People who can sit down and dash off a sheet

full of gossip in the space of half an hour, have little idea of the labour which it cost Roger to convey his thoughts by means of his pen. No wonder words were scarce, and information somewhat meagre, when each separate stroke of the "m's and y's and g's" had to be laboriously formed and carefully examined before the next letter could be joined on, and when the toil of several nights was necessary before an epistle of three or four scrawled uneven pages could be composed, written out, folded up, and fairly deposited by Roger's own hands in the box of the Marton post-office.

Jessie knew enough, however, of the squire's good deeds to make her feel interested in hearing more. Before tea was over, she was made acquainted with the substance of pretty nearly all the conversations which at one time and another Roger and Marget had had the honour of holding with Mr. Holdych. She knew what improvements had been made by him at the Hall, and what changes were going on in the village. How "old Wimsley" had been put out of the stewardship, and the office given to a nephew of little Miss

Gale, who had taken for a permanency the spare apartments in his aunt's cottage, and seemed likely, as Roger said, to do a sight better for the estate than ever the lawyer had done afore him.

Jessie coloured up the least in the world at the mention of the lawyer's name. That little circumstance that had transpired in the green-blinded office, was one of the few secrets which she had kept entirely to herself. It had made her feel so bad at the time, even to think of it, that she could not muster courage to speak about it, though she had wished she could have got her uncle and aunt somehow told of the affair. It may be readily supposed that the disappointed wooer himself did not volunteer any account of the matter. Roger, therefore, went on quite unconsciously, to comment on the domestic relations of the unfortunate lawyer.

"He made a bad job of it, he did, marrying that widdy Lupton. She's t' master o' that house if ever anybody was, an' a poor time he has with her too, by all accounts. I can't but pity him, poor man, for all he's been so mean hisself. I doubt he wont be able to keep going much longer,

now he's lost the agency. You see she lost her forten when she married him. Lupton had made his will so that it should all go from her if ever she married again, an' he didn't find it out, didn't Wimsley, while it was owre late to back out on't."

"Is she so extravagant, then?" asked Jessie.

"Ay, poor woman, and worse too, I doubt," said Roger; "but let's talk o' summut else. It's taking up a reproach again wer neighbour, is this, an' that's an ill thing to do. It's wonderful hoo one slips into t' way on't without thinking. Now, Jessie, you haven't done, have you? Tak' another bit o' cake. Come, you've had a long fast, an' you didn't get a deal to your breakfast, I reckon, afore you started. You'd be owre full o' t' thoughts o' your journey for much eating. I allays is mysel'. Have a drop more tea then."

"No more, uncle, thank you," said Jessie. "I've had enough. I couldn't take any more, indeed."

Roger saw that Marget also had put her spoon into her cup in token that she, too, had finished her meal. He bent down his head and uttered

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his short and hearty grace. "An' noo, Jessie, let's have t' things sided out, an' we'll unloose t' box cord, an' see all t' fine things as you've brought wi' you from Lunnon."

"Noo, bide a wee, Roger," said Marget, as she moved back her chair from the table and brushed away the crumbs off her apron. "We maun hae the china washed first. It's the best set, ye ken, and it wad be a sorry ending o' the day to get ane o' the cups crackit wi' standing 'em to a side, instead o' putting 'em back in their places."

"Let me wash them up, aunt; you've got your Sunday gown on," cried Jessie, starting from her seat. "Do, it'll be a treat. I haven't washed up tea things I don't know when."

"Na," said Marget, "I'm no' going to let you start wark afore you've been hame a day. Sit you down, an' I'll have 'em dune just now."

But already Jessie had got her gown pinned up round her waist, before setting to work, and was looking in the long drawer of the oak dresser, where, of old, the tea towels used to be kept.

"It's a pretty set," she said, as she piled the

plates and cups carefully on the tray, "I mind these little gold sprays ever since I was a little thing five years old. It was one afternoon, Mrs. Leaf came to tea and Mrs. Grant, and I know you had them out. And Mrs. Leaf brought me a little glass box full of coloured comfits. I suppose that made me remember about it. What a time you've had them, and never one been broken yet!"

"Ay, puir Mrs. Holdych, I'll no' forget her while I have this china set," said Marget. "It was her wedding present to me, puir leddie, when Roger an' me was married. It wasna lang afore she died. Eh, dearie me! to think hoo time flies. Eight-and-twenty years! It gars me feel as if I was growing auld, and Maister Leonard a wee laddie then. Four years auld he wad be. An' to see him now, a man upgrown, an' master o' Marton Hall, where I've played wi' him an' scolded him, an' hushit him to sleep, many's the time. I aye kenned he'd turn out well, wad Maister Leonard."

"It's a wonder he doesn't get married," said Jessie. "A gentleman like him, an' such a beau-

tiful place as the Hall to live at. It's a pity there shouldn't be a lady at it. Why, he must be almost lost in that big house with no one but himself."

"I daresay he feels lonesome in it, whiles," answered Marget, who was rubbing bright the spoons that Jessie had just finished washing.

"However, if I'm no wrang, he doesna mean to be his lane for lang. He's aye gaun down to the Priory House, twa three times a week, an' mair sometimes. An' I've seen him look at Mrs. Clyde's face, when she's been in the kirk, as if he was drawing his very life fra hers. He was awa' wi' her yesterday, her an' Miss Alison, an' the Canon, owre the hills somewhere. There was a kirk outbye that the Canon was opening, an' they all went thegither. I ken brawly, if she doesna say him nay, she'll be leddy o' Marton Hall afore anither simmer's gane. An' a richt bonnie leddie she'll mak' for it, too."

"Mrs. Clyde," said Jessie, in a musing tone. "She's just Miss Janet to me. I can't think of her as anything else. And she's going to be married again. What a day it will be for Marton

if the wedding be in the church here! She'll make a pretty bride if she's like what she used to be."

"Ay, she will that," said Roger, putting in his word. "I've never seen one yet that could hold a candle to Mrs. Clyde. If it wasn't for manners I could sit in the church o' Sunday mornings an' never take my eyes from off her face, it's that sweet an' fair. Not as she'd see me, though, I daresay, if I was, for she stands with her eyes dropped down on her book, an' her face folded down so calm an' quiet, like a lily with its leaves wrapped round it. It's a means o' grace it is, just to look at her face when they're singing the Psalms. It's like a psalm itself. It does me good just to get a sight of it now an' again."

Jessie was standing opposite to the window, wiping her last cup, and rubbing it round with the soft towel she had in her hand.

"I do believe," she exclaimed, "yon's Mrs. Clyde coming through the Lodge gate."

"It is, I declare," said Roger, turning round and looking out between the leaves of the plants that stood in the casement. "They say, 'talk of

the angels, an' you'll hear the flutter o' their wings.' She'll be going to the rectory to see Miss Alison."

"Nay," said Marget, who had approached the window, and was looking out also over Roger's shoulder, "she hasna turned down that way. Jessie, Jessie, if she isna coming here, an' the bowl and things all standing about!" And Marget, forgetful of her best gown, seized up the wet bowl and towel and carried them off into the back kitchen, while Jessie as hastily unpinned her dress and shook it down about her, smoothed back her soft golden hair, took a sly peep at herself in the little looking-glass that hung beside the window; and when a moment after, a dainty little rap was heard at the door, Marget's kitchen looked as bright and trim as ever, and Jessie was ready with a smiling face to welcome the visitor whose appearance had been thus auspiciously announced.

CHAPTER IV.

CAUGHT IN THE RAIN.

IT was to take him to the Bedesby station that Leonard wanted Bayard so early the next morning. He was going up to London to attend a parliamentary committee, and he meant to start by the first train so as to accomplish some business of his own the same afternoon. He had also a little commission to execute for Janet, who, learning some days before that he was going up to town, had begged him to take charge for her of some antique family gems of considerable value, which she wished to have re-set in the present style, so as to enable her, if she chose, to wear them.

Janet had furnished him with full instructions

respecting them, and was to have given him the casket containing them when she reached home that night. But when Leonard parted from her after that memorable drive, no thought of the jewels entered into the minds of either of them, and not until he began the next morning to make preparations for his journey, did he recollect the promise he had made. He gave orders to Michael to saddle a horse immediately, then went into the library and wrote a note to Janet explaining his omission, and requesting her to send the casket by the man. He folded and addressed the note, but laying it hastily aside, blotted the direction, of which the ink was still wet upon the envelope. He took another, putting the one which he had just defaced within the leaves of the case. There was no fire in the room, and he would not throw the cover on which her name was inscribed into the waste-paper basket that stood beneath the table.

The note was scarcely ready when the servant appeared at the door, to take it. He gave it to him, bidding him use all possible despatch, then completed his preparations, breakfasted, and

by nine o'clock was on his way to Bedesby with the casket safely packed in his valise. It was far on in the afternoon when he reached London, though there were still remaining several hours of the long summer day. He drove straight to the hotel, dined, and then went out to despatch the little matters of business which he had on hand. They were soon disposed of. Janet's casket was entrusted to the goldsmith's care, and having the evening still before him after all was accomplished, he debated for a moment, and then resolved to spend it at the Opera.

It was *Faust* they were performing. But weird and brilliant as it was to-night, Leonard gave but little heed to what he saw. Once seated in his place, the thought of Janet stole gently back and folded itself around him. Wherever he turned, her face rose like a fair shadow before his eyes. Even while he listened to the music and watched the mimic life upon the stage, he was living over again the two preceding days, exulting in the "sober certainty of waking bliss" which they had left behind. For though, fixed in his own confidence of love, he had never doubted that he

should win her for his own, yet the knowledge that he had really done so, came upon him now with all the sweetness of surprise.

And with this knowledge, a new chapter in his history seemed opening out before him, new plans, new projects, new incentives to exertion—for, with all its joy, he meant his life to be no idle pastime, but a steady, earnest service in that great cause which all true men, whatever their position, will find means to further. Not a pastime, yet not a toil. And his thoughts sprang up exultingly as he looked forward to long years of happy, free activity, filled with noble deeds, and sunned by the glad light of love.

And all this time, behind the footlights on the stage, was Faust, striving, suffering, listening to the wily fiend;—was the golden-haired Margaret, weaving with innocent unconscious hands a thread of shame into the fabric of her fair young life. Once as he looked, it was when she was kneeling in the chapel with the tears upon her sad repentant face, some strange far-off resemblance recalled to him the laughing beauty at Marton—all that he had banished out of sight. But the

fancy glanced aside. He was driving Janet through the wood, and reading in her downcast eyes the answer to his love. And after this he took no note of time until the opera was ended, and then he came away. He did not care to stay for the ballet. There was an instinct of purity in his soul, quickened now by his deepening love, that withheld him from desecrating the sanctity of his new-born reverence for woman, by watching the wanton loveliness of the poor danseuses, as they flung off their modesty that they might catch applause.

He was just rising to leave, when a man came round with ices on a tray. The place was hot, and the little rosy heaps upon the plates looked cool and refreshing. He took one, and sitting down again with it, began to watch the bustle and stir throughout the house, as the audience found themselves released from their attention to the performance. People were paying their little visits to the boxes of their friends; others who wished to get comfortably to their carriages, or who, like himself, cared only for the music, were taking their departure. Here

and there Leonard caught sight of an acquaintance at a distance, who bowed to him across the crowd. Gradually, however, those who were remaining began to subside into their places. Leonard signed to the man to fetch his plate, and taking his hat, made his way out.

It was raining heavily when he got to the door, pouring down in torrents, deluging the streets with pools of wet that flashed back a thousand broken reflections from the gas-lamps above.

There was a long line of carriages standing before the colonnade in front of the Opera House, but every cab was gone. The people who had come out before him had taken all there were, and none had yet returned. It was impossible to go on foot through the storm; he would be wet through directly. A policeman was standing by. Leonard gave him a shilling and bade him fetch the first cab he could get. The man took it and ran down the street to seek one, while Leonard, shivering in the damp blast after coming out of the crowded house, stood up by one of the columns awaiting his return.

There were several people standing under the

arches in a similar predicament to himself. Close by was a group of ladies dragging their light opera cloaks over their shoulders and shuddering at each fresh gush of wind that came swirling down the colonnade. Just behind were a couple of Frenchmen swearing so volubly in their own language at the rain, the damp, the cold, and the inconvenience of waiting there in the wet, that Leonard moved away in disgust to the next pillar, to avoid the annoyance of their noisy discontent.

He found himself close beside a woman, who was standing, drenched with rain, against the other side of the column.

Evidently she had come there to shelter from the storm, and had not yet been "moved on" by the policeman who was walking up and down under the arcade. Something in the appearance of the woman arrested the attention of Leonard. She had her back to him, so that he could not see her face, which was turned away towards the street. He could discern, however, beneath the wet shawl which she had drawn tightly around her, the majestic outline of her figure, the almost

imperious carelessness of her attitude, the regal set of her head above the sloping, well-formed shoulders. She might have been a countess waiting for her carriage, but for the thread-bare, faded shawl, the shabby dress, the limp rusty bonnet, and the bundle she was holding in her arms, which marked out her place as being far down in the social scale.

A dressmaker, most likely, thought Leonard to himself, as he watched her standing like a statue beside the pillar, her head thrown slightly back, and the noble contour of her form clearly defined through the thin damp dress.

Still the rain came splashing down upon the pavement, rattling on the tops of the carriages outside, and sparkling in the pools of wet in the road. The wind roared like thunder down the street. No sign as yet of the storm abating, and still the woman stood erect and motionless, gazing out into the tempest.

Leonard watched her, he knew not why, with a curious intentness. Caught in the rain, with nothing to do but wait, one lets such trifles occupy the mind. Suddenly, he heard from her

a long sobbing sigh, not one of impatient weariness, but a sigh such as escapes involuntarily from depths of bitterness and pain fermenting in the heart.

She did not move, however, nor was the sigh repeated. Perhaps she had herself been scarcely conscious of it. One meets day by day in London streets so many women—God help their weakness—toiling through life beneath their unshared load of woe. It is such a common thing, one cannot spare pity for them all. Yet somehow to-night, Leonard felt himself oppressed by that woman's sigh. It fell with a nameless weight upon his own heart also. He wished she would turn so as to give him a glimpse of her face. He wanted to see what sort of a soul it was that had thus told out its sadness. They were standing at the farther end of the arcade, a little apart from the rest of the shelterers. The two Frenchmen had changed their places, and were swearing at a distance, looking out in vain for an empty cab. Leonard moved down farther still and planted himself against the very last column. Poor as she was, unprotected and alone, his native courtesy

would not allow him to betray to the woman that he had noticed her, or risk annoying her by an open look.

He did not need to do it. At the sound of his steps passing her by, she drew a little back and turned slowly round, as if to see who it was that had approached.

Merciful Heaven! What was it he saw there pale beneath the gaslight that flared above their heads? A woman's face, a wan, woman's face, with golden dishevelled hair beneath the rusty black bonnet, and large hollow eyes staring wildly into his.

With a great pang, his heart sank down within him, crushed as if beneath mountains of lead. A vision of blasted hopes swept through like lightning and scathed his brain. Had those blue eyes then never been closed in their death sleep, that they should be striking now this horror into his soul?

For an instant they stood, the woman and he, as if fascinated each by the other's gaze. Then with the speed of madness she had fled out into the storm, and in a moment, down some lane or alley, was out of sight.

Leonard looked after her, but with no power to stir. His life seemed paralysed within him. Where she left him, there he stood, gazing vacantly into the corner against the column, as if he saw still the weary face, that like an apparition from the grave, had chilled the very blood within his veins.

"Your cab, sir," said the policeman, coming up and touching his hat.

The man's voice smote like thunder on his ears. He was himself again, standing under the colonnade in the flaring gaslight, with the wind still blowing furiously down the street, and the rain splashing in the pools upon the road, and the dripping footmen standing by their horses. His first impulse was to rush down the street in the direction which the woman had taken, and if he could, to track her steps. But even as the thought came into his mind, he felt how futile would be the attempt. She would be safe from his pursuit now, lost amid the darkness and intricacies of the London lanes. Besides, why seek her out? Enough that he had seen her living face like a silent knell over his murdered joys.

There are moments into which is forced the life of years, moments it may be, of deep, unutterable joy, the light of which never fades quite away on this side of the grave; or of scorching misery which dries up like a sirocco blast the fresh green verdure of the heart, and leaves instead a baked and barren wilderness. When Leonard turned at the sound of the policeman's voice, he seemed to have left already at an immeasurable distance behind him all that belonged to his Marton life. Janet's face, which till now had been continually beside him, a sweet presence of delight, rising before his eyes in every pause of thought, loomed far off across an immense, impassable gulf. Instead of boundless fields of hope stretching around him on every side, arose a mighty prison-house, whose inexorable barriers were shutting him in to darkness and despair.

The woman he had seen was his *Wife!*

CHAPTER V.

THE CONFLICT.

THERE are in every man's nature two principles, the evil and the good, warring the one against the other. The old Pagans, groping blindly in the dark, laid hold of this primary truth. To their dim senses it presented itself in the guise of a guardian angel, and a guardian—if so we may speak—a guardian demon, waging an endless conflict in the battle-field of each man's soul. We, in our day of clearer light, define the struggle in a different way, but put it as we may, the thing remains the same. There is in every one this secret consciousness of inward strife. The best man feels all too keenly that there are hours when this evil genius deals desperate thrusts,

which his good angel is sore pressed to withstand; the worst is not without seasons when the demon within is well-nigh disabled beneath its adversary's sudden stroke.

Between these two opposing forces there raged in Leonard's soul a furious struggle, as he thought on the results to which this fatal encounter beneath the colonnade of the opera-house must lead. The blow that had fallen upon him had been so sudden that, for the moment, his brain had reeled beneath the shock. For a moment only, and then every sense of mind and body awoke to a preternatural activity. The haunting dread which his sober reason had never been able completely to allay, had resolved itself at last into a hopeless certainty. For it was his wife whom he had seen in that wan, faded woman, with her shabby dress and imperial figure. There was no mistaking those once familiar features, pale and wasted though they were. From the moment that he had seen her face turned so wildly upon his, he had recognised his fate, he had known that the fetters which, in the heat of youthful passion, he had forged

for himself, were still bound tightly round him.

Seven years ago, smitten by a sudden passion, he had married this woman, married her beauty, knowing that he had not won her love. Now, like an avenging fate, she stood between him and the accomplishment of all that made life dear. No effort of his, however, could fathom the mystery of this strange reappearance of one whom all supposed to have died as soon as she became his wife. True, though every one believed her drowned, no traces of the missing one had been ever discovered, beyond the hat which, floating by the river brink, had told the sad tale of her untimely end. Still, no doubt had existed in the minds of any—save that vague, impalpable suspicion in his own—that beneath the deep dark waters of the Ericht, the new-made wife had found her grave.

This hidden doubt it was, tormenting him with a jealousy that overwhelmed even the keenness of his sense of loss, which had impelled him to keep the secret of this hasty marriage—annulled as soon as it had been completed. It had been easy to do

this. There was little communication with the outer world, in that remote Scottish village, where the young girl lived whose beauty had maddened him to urge her, with wild, passionate entreaties that would not be withstood, to become his wife. And he himself, with the proud reserve that he had been accustomed to maintain upon his own affairs, had never made known among his club companions the story of his love, if love it could be called, which was but the sudden kindling of stores of passion lying unlit as yet within his breast, and which the dazzling beauty of this golden-haired girl had fanned into a flame.

He had no relatives to consult, none, at least, besides his uncle, who had just been reduced by paralysis to a state of second childishness. There was no one who might hinder him from taking, if he chose, this young governess to be his wife, the future mistress of Marton Hall. Six weeks only had elapsed from the day when first he saw her, to that on which her old grandfather gave her to him, in the parlour of the quiet Scottish manse where she had her home. No time for rumours to get buzzed about, and when

suddenly his prize was snatched out of his hands, none but the inhabitants of that secluded village knew that it had been his own. He never betrayed himself by word or hint, never visited again the scene of his wild, brief love. He crushed down with an iron hand the memory even of all that those few weeks had held; for whatever others might believe, and his own reason itself confirm to him, the sharpest sting of all had been the intrusion of that poisonous doubt, that his lost wife might be indeed, not dead but false.

He had never been able to shake off the idea of this terrible possibility. There was nothing that might give colour to the suspicion. None besides himself had ever entertained it, yet it had wormed itself into his brain till it had become at one time almost a belief. Year after year, however, passed on, and gradually the impression was worn away by time. Whether she were lost or dead no news had ever come, which might shake the general belief that Isabel Moir had found a watery grave. Wherever she might be, if living, indeed, she were, she had never

come back to tell her tale. And so as slowly he outgrew his former self, as his higher nature developed and new interests pushed the old ones aside, he learned to think with quietness, or not at all, of that long past season of chaotic passion and tempestuous distress. He felt even a sort of cool disdain for the way in which he had suffered himself to be driven helplessly along like a leaf before the wind, by the mere force of a woman's beauty; roused to his senses, he grew ashamed almost of this youthful weakness, and intrenched himself henceforward in a citadel of indifference, against which the batteries of female fascination might be in vain directed.

No man, however, is in very truth the keeper of his own heart. He may hold the fortress for a time—hold it until Love, its lord, encamps before it—and then he must needs surrender. Leonard had been proof against the charms of wit and grace and beauty. Bright eyes had rained down unheeded influence upon him, bewitching smiles glanced harmlessly aside. Janet came, and at the touch of her hand, the sound of her voice, he had yielded all; and yielding all, he

found, too, that he had received it all again. And now, must he once more part with all—part with it, knowing that what he sacrificed could never be replaced? How bitterly he rued the chance, if chance it could be called, that had led him on that one night to see that opera performed! The chance that had kept him waiting in the rain beneath the colonnade, waiting only that he might see the face that had struck this death into his heart. If even those two Frenchmen had not annoyed him with their talk, all this might not have been. Yet, he reflected, the secret was still his own. Why not keep it still? Who would know that he had seen his wife, unless he were his own betrayer? Locked in his own breast as this tormenting doubt had always been, who could blame him if he acted in accordance with the belief of all beside himself?

He was taken at an advantage. For a time the temptation bore down upon him with overmastering strength. His will was crushed; honour lay grovelling in the dust. Then, in the very moment of defeat, a new force appeared upon the field. *She* might track him out, might,

for aught he knew, appear again when he was not alone, to confound him with her presence. She had fled from him this time, as though struck with an equal terror with himself; but could he guard against the wild impulses by which, at some future time, she might be driven back to him? And would not a whole lifetime of happiness be dearly purchased at such a risk?

Armed with this thought, his vanquished honour rose again. He smote down the fair sin. His resolve was made. He would tell Janet all, and abide by her decision, whatever it might be. Alas! alas! he knew too well there was but one result to follow his confession. He saw his happiness floating from him, away, away, while he was powerless to reach out his hand and draw it back. He watched it drifting out, as the drowning mariner might watch the receding spar on which his only chance of safety lay.

All night long he tossed upon his bed in his sumptuous apartment at the Victoria Hotel. He tried to sleep, but sleep fled at his call. He would have given hours of waking life for one moment's respite from his fevered thoughts. But

the short summer darkness gave place to dawn; the twilight struggled into day; the morning sun fell in threads of light between the closed Venetian blinds; and still he found himself awake. It was useless trying any longer to sleep. He rose and dressed; he looked at his watch; it was half-past eight, scarcely ten hours since he had stood for those few minutes waiting in the rain. Yet in that time he felt as though he had borne the burden of years. His whole soul bowed beneath the load. Still he would not yield his manhood to the yoke. His native pride, his indomitable will, sustained him now, and enabled him to bring again a brave face before the world. He went to the Committee he had been summoned to attend, lunched at the House, and was just in time to drive down to the station and take the last train for Bedesby. The carriage was nearly full; one place only was vacant. He took it, the signal was given, there was a sudden vociferous screech of the railway-whistle, and again he was speeding on towards Bedesby—towards Marton—towards Janet—with the untold tale that was to build up between them a wall of separation

which no love of theirs might ever find leave to scale.

It was dark when the train came into the station at Bedesby—the still, warm darkness of a summer night. The moon was rising, though, and by the time he had arrived at Marton, was already pouring down a flood of faint silvery light upon the drooping branches of the tall cedars on the lawn, casting clear shadows that slept quietly upon the smooth green turf below. He got down at the side entrance, and went through the garden-door into the house. How strangely hushed and empty it felt! The hanging lamp in the hall was burning within its crimson shade, throwing a warm diffused light on all around, deepening the ruby tints of the rich masses of bloom on the plants near the great entrance, and shining back with a ruddy glow from the suits of empty armour that looked down solemnly from their pedestals in the corners. Lights were burning in the drawing-room, in the dining-room, too, where refreshments were spread on the table; but over all a strange silence seemed to have fallen, a silence that might be felt. He went in

and poured himself out a glass of wine. He drank two or three, one after the other; but he was too uneasy and exhausted, both in mind and body, to sit down and eat. The wine refreshed him for a moment, though still a sense of restless depression possessed his spirit. He paced up and down the room for a few seconds, and, then, oppressed by the garish light that blazed down from the many-branched chandelier, he went out and across the hall into the library.

All here was gloom and quiet. The wan, green moonlight was falling coldly through the window, casting the shadows of the tall mullions and the triple arches, dark and clear upon the floor. In the dim, gleaming light he could see everything lying straight and in order—the motionless lines of the curtains, the chairs set up against the wall, the faint shimmer on the gilded backs of the volumes ranged upon the shelves of the book-cases, the grey outlines of the marble busts on the brackets. There were the books piled in their usual order on the table, the bronze standish, the loose blotting-case beside it, lying as he had used it the morning before he went. He opened

it, hardly thinking of what he was doing. There was the envelope within the leaves, with the defaced address, "Mrs. Clyde, Priory House," the name that a few short hours ago he had hoped might soon be hers no longer.

He took it out of the blotting-case and laid it in the fold of his pocket-book. Then, for a moment a sharp pang shot into his breast, as he realized with fresh vividness what it was that had so lately been wrenched away from him. Strong man as he was, proud at heart even towards himself, he could have cried aloud just then for very bitterness of soul. He fought with his fate, his hands clenched themselves together, his eyebrows gathered into a rigid line, hiding even the fierce light that burned deep down within his eyes. For a moment the struggle lasted, and then he lifted his head and looked around into the pale cold light that was streaming full upon him through the uncurtained window.

He turned towards it, and stood gazing out into the moonlit garden. All lay hushed and motionless, sharp lights and deep shadows near at hand, farther off a faint colourless haze

where the mists rising from the river lay over the low meadow land beyond and hid the woods beneath their dense grey veil.

The moon had risen high now. She was but little past the full, and the nearer stars were all paled in her beams, their light quenched in the flood of radiance that streamed over half the sky. Only far away, Jupiter rode royally through the heavens, and fainter lights gleamed more feebly through the luminous haze. Not a cloud, as Leonard looked out, flecked the pale expanse, not a breath of wind stirred the tall tree tops, not a shadow wavered on the level lawn. Around him was a cold dead earth, beyond, a universe far off, apart, moving on in its unceasing, silent march. But all so utterly unlinked from him, as he stood there alone, imprisoned in himself, feeling in all its intensity that terrible sense of isolation which itself is like a living death.

There comes to most men at one time or other of their lives a season such as this, when for a space the hands of all earthly companion are unlinked from theirs, and alone in a solitude

wide as the world they feel themselves untended, God-forgotten, the orphans of humanity. To Leonard's lips in that hour was this cup of desolation forced, unmixed, and brimmed. He drained it to the dregs, and then slowly the strong agony passed away. Warm hands were laid about his heart. The icy bands were loosed. Once more, life from without flowed in upon his soul. Whence and how he could not tell, but an unseen influence had chased away that night of death. Nature no longer lay a mighty corpse before him. She looked at him with an aspect full of solace and encouragement. He saw himself again, no waif or stray drifting aimlessly on the great ocean of humanity, his being bounded in himself. He saw himself what he was in truth, a thought of God—a line flung out from eternity into time, one end lying loose upon the waves of life, the other resting in the great Father's hand. He too was a child and cared for. All need not be a failure because his hopes of happiness had been thus rudely wrecked. There was something which even he might yet attain. And then, through the rifts which this

sharp suffering had made, there streamed a fresh beam of light into his darkened soul. He saw that not happiness alone, not even love, beautiful and almost divine as it had seemed to be, was the supreme end of life. Beyond all these he now discerned a higher, a more comprehensive aim—the growth of character, the endless development of himself, the telling out in accents ringing and distinct, that message from the Infinite which it had been given him, and him alone, to deliver to the world around.

He felt for the moment an inward strength that would enable him to do and suffer all. Calmed by this new consciousness of power, he turned from the window, and throwing himself down in the great chair beside the table, he set himself resolutely to consider how best he might communicate to Janet the strange, sad story which he had to tell.

For cost him what it might, he was determined she should know the truth. He would have no reserves; he owed it to her, and he would tell her all. But he would do it quietly; he would not let her see how deep and overmastering was his

own wild love for her. She might be startled, he reflected, if he did; driven to avoid him, perhaps, through very pity for his pain. And he could not bring himself yet to think of utter banishment from her presence. He must see her sometimes, hold her hand for a momentary greeting, look into the living depths of those liquid eyes. It should not be often. He would go very seldom now to the Priory House. He would even hold himself henceforward somewhat distantly towards her. There should be nothing in his manner that might make her feel any flutter of hesitation in her intercourse with him. He would chain down his love and be again a friend, just a friend, he to her, and she to him; only he must be near her, he must see her sometimes, only sometimes. Gradually, as he pondered, overpowered by watching, exhaustion, and excitement, the brain gave way before the weary body, and before he was aware, the sleep he had sought in vain the night before had stolen gently over him.

It might be reality, it might be only a dream; but when he awoke, he felt still the pressure of a

soft, warm cheek against his own, of two arms clasped around his neck. There was a strange sweetness in the empty air, a sense of infinite, unutterable joy trembling throughout his frame. If it was a dream, it was more blessed than reality had ever been. It had lifted him into a fair full life such as waking hours had never known. For it was Janet who had been near him, he knew it, though he could recall nothing beyond the feeling of that sweet, mysterious embrace. He opened his eyes, and looked round upon the dim, grey dawn that was struggling into the room. He was not asleep, yet still that lingering consciousness remained. It interposed like a veil between the present and the past. He saw nothing beyond. Memory could not yet reach back to grasp the events of the preceding day. For a space the fast-shut prison doors had been set open wide. The iron gate of Destiny had unclosed itself before him. He was free once more, feeling no longer the fetters by which he was bound, not yet thrust back by the relentless hand of reason into the dungeon of waking life.

He would not rouse himself or disturb by a

single movement that strange sense of communion which folded round him still. He leaned back his head on the cushion of the chair, and before the impression had faded quite away, he was asleep once more.

It was broad daylight when he woke again. Instead of the sharp, cold moonbeams resting on the floor, the sun was shining in at the window with a broad, lusty light. The bronze timepiece on the mantelpiece was just striking the hour with a keen, tinkling sound. It was eight o'clock. Day had come again, and with it memory and consciousness. The tired brain had gathered back its strength. Reason rose up refreshed. For a moment—no longer—a lingering haze overspread his faculties ; then in an instant it had cleared away, and with a terrible distinctness the remembrance of all that had occurred since he had left the Hall two days ago, crowded into his mind. There was no pause, no rest now. Sleep had done its work, and at once, without delay, the rush of thought began. A thousand conflicting emotions swept tumultuously through his breast; only amid them all stood that immoveable resolve which

nothing now could shake. There was lying before him this duty, and already he felt impatient until it should be accomplished. He must see Janet, he must tell her all; afterwards he would re-arrange his life, and fit it to his straitened lot.

As the sense of all that he was thus putting from him surged in upon his mind, a bitter thought arose towards the woman who was thus shutting him out from all home-happiness in life. He smote it down. Was his conscience then so clear towards her, that he might presume thus to lay at her door alone the reproach of these ruined hopes of his? She had wronged him deeply, cruelly had wronged him, but in his inmost heart he felt remorse disarming his resentment. He was but reaping the harvest of that which he himself had sown. He knew it, and therein lay the sharpest sting of all.

CHAPTER VI.

BROTHERHOOD.

IT was still early when he set out on his way through the wood to the Priory House, early, at least, for making calls, but the restlessness within him would not brook delay. Leonard was a man who never faltered in a purpose, whatever it might be. Once having made up his mind, he went straight on to the accomplishment of his object. And so now, having determined to confess to Janet all that made it impossible for him to seek her love, he allowed no miserable reluctance of his own, no dread of the suffering which he felt too surely he must inflict on her, to cause him to swerve from his resolution.

He hurried on beneath the cool shade of the

trees, as though in haste to be at his journey's end. Then turning out of the wood into the lane, he slackened his pace. It was coming very near now, and he shrank like a child from the ordeal that lay before him. At last the brown roof of the Priory House appeared in sight above the green beech hedge that shut in the garden. He lingered a moment beneath the shadow of the chestnuts at the gate. What had seemed hard even in prospect grew almost impossible to him now. A moment more, and he had passed out of the lane into the still secluded garden, all ablaze with the glowing hues of countless summer flowers. There they grew, close pressed together in the sunny borders on the lawn, crimson, white, and gold, a mass of dazzling mosaic work, resplendent as cathedral windows shone through by the sunset light.

He looked up to the Oriel window of the dining-room, where in the morning Janet usually sat. How often, hearing his steps upon the gravel, she had glanced up from her book or work with a bright smile of welcome as he approached! She was not there now. Her low chair was standing in its usual place just within the curtains. There was a book

lying on it and a glass of flowers upon the table, but no appearance of any one within the room. He went round the house to the front door and rang. He heard the faint peal of the bell at the further end of the lobby. There was no drawing back now, he must go on with what he had set himself to do. The door opened—Mrs. Clyde was not at home. She had gone to Bedesby scarcely half an hour ago, the servant said, with Mr. Brande.

For a moment Leonard could not repress the sudden feeling of relief. There would be still a little breathing time.

"They are coming back at four o'clock to dinner," added the girl, seeing that he hesitated as he stood in the porch. "Can I give her any message?"

He debated an instant. "Tell Mrs. Clyde that, if she is at liberty, I will call again this evening."

He turned away, as he came, with his secret still untold, and went back through the garden into the lane. He wished now she had been at home, that so these intervening hours might have been spared to him. And then, again, as he walked on through the wood, hushed now in the

stillness of the summer noon, he went over in his thoughts all that he meant to say. He was longing to have it over, so that he might look upon it as a thing behind, and be able to meet the coming hours, if not without a dull, aching sense of want, yet without this chilling apprehension which he was feeling now.

The day had turned out close and sultry. Coming from the cool shadow of the wood the sun beat down fiercely on his head. It was a relief to get within doors, safely sheltered from its burning heat.

"There's Roger Lee, sir, here, been waiting to see you," said a servant who was passing the door as he entered.

Leonard felt a movement of impatience. He was not in the mood just now for seeing any one. He walked forward, however, into the library and bade the servant tell him to come in.

"It was a bit o' business, sir," said Roger, when he had pulled his hair and sat down on the chair Leonard had pointed out to him, "as I'd made bold to come about."

Roger was not feeling exactly at his ease.

He saw at a glance that there was something this morning in the manner of the Squire different from his usual frank cordiality.

"I wouldn't ha' stopped, but the man said he thowt you'd be back enow. I can come another time, sir, if you're owre throng."

"Sit still, Roger, sit still," said Leonard, putting out his hand as Roger shifted uneasily upon his chair. "What is it you have got on hand?"

"It's t'chapel, sir," said Roger, re-assured by the tone of Mr. Holdych's voice. "We're ready noo to begin building of it."

"What, already! you Methodists don't let the grass grow under your feet. Why, it is not much more than a month since I gave you the promise of the land."

"Six weeks, sir. We've gotten all t' plans an' things made out. Foster o' Bedesby's going to do t' brickwork, an' George Medley here's got t' woodwork. He's a member is George Medley, an' being a young man just starting for hisself, we thought it nowt but right t' encourage him, or else there was Weston would ha' done it for a

trifle less. But you see, sir, they hing together, does Methodisses—it's their natur'."

"And you think you will be able to pay for it all when you have got it built?"

"No fear o' that, sir," said Roger, rubbing his hands. "We've gotten better nor half on it already, me an' Mr. Leaf, an' there'll be a good bit more when it's oppened. We shall have a good few o' t' Bedesby folk out, besides wer own. That'll bring us pretty well on, an' then we can easy borrow t' rest. Chapels allers reckons to have a bit o' debt upon 'em. It does for ballast as you may say."

"Then when do you mean to begin?"

"Why, sir, that war what I'd comed about. We thowt it would nobbut be manners to let you know as we was ready, seeing we was beholden to you for t' ground, an' then we could start right away."

"And when do you expect to get it finished?"

"Why, sir, not much afore spring, I doubt. You see we shall get the walls up this back end, an' then there's t' winter 'll be on, an' it's bad getting 't plaster dried, or else we'd ha' been glad

to ha' gotten out o't barn if we could, afore t' cold weather gets agate. It's airy i' summer is t' barn, but I can't say much for it i' winter. There's a deal o' folks gets colds, though it's done up reg'lar for Sundays wi' wisps o' straw in all the cracks an' places. There's nobbut one corner that's to call comfortable i' bad weather, and t' old folks sits there, an' them as has rheumaticks an' such like. But bless the Lord, he gives us good times there, fair weather an' foul, an' when we've been there a bit, singing an' that, an' gotten wer hearts well warmed up, we clean forgets that wer backs is none so warm as they might be. There's a many in this here place that's found that old barn the gate o' heaven to their souls. The Lord's not particklar where he meets wi' folks, so as he sees they're a-seeking of him. He's made our barn a temple many's the time, an' he does no more, not wi' Bedesby Minster itself. It's a poor place yon of ours, an' they're poor people mostly that worships in it, but he's not tied to this place nor that, isn't the Lord, nor he's no respecter o' persons neither."

"I suppose not, Roger," said Leonard, clearing a space on the table before him, and leaning his folded arms upon it. "He does not inquire, I imagine, whether a man is respectable or not before he listens to what he has got to say."

This was a remark after Roger's own heart. There was a "vast o' good" in the Squire, he thought, for all he was a rich man, and rich men, if the Bible said true, found it a sight harder to win heaven than them that had less of this world sticking to them, and hindering them on their way.

It encouraged him, too, to hold forth a little further on the subject that was never very far from Roger's heart. He had no reserves, except such as his sense of "manners" dictated to him. Whatever was uppermost, Roger generally gave utterance to it. You might see the workings of his mind, if you were so disposed, just as you might look through a glass hive at the bees building up their cells within. His was one of those honest happy natures, sensitive withal, yet with a greater capacity for enjoyment than for suffering, whose sympathies strike their roots into

everything around them. The warmth at his heart seemed to ray forth and melt down all before it. Just now it beamed out upon his landlord, who, notwithstanding his disadvantages in being a gentleman, appeared to Roger to have a "wonderful notion o' truth."

"You say true, sir," he replied, with a broad smile spreading itself over his face, "there's them that thinks the Lord nobbut looks after rich folks, an' them that's gotten larning an' eddication, an' leaves the poor uns to shift for theirselves; but then you see, that's because they judge him by theirselves. An' it's wonderful, it is, his ways is from ours.

"Mebby there's one man as wears a Bishop's apron, and sits up in his palace like yon at Bedesby, an' no harm neither, for St. Paul says hisself, 'him that desireth the office of a Bishop, desireth a good thing'—an' there's another, mebby, as wears a leather un, and stands in his forge all day long, like me, and lots beside; but, bless you, the Lord makes no sort o' count what sort o' aprons we wear. We shall have to pull 'em off, whatever they be, when we lie us

down to wer last sleep. What he looks to see, is whether we've gotten the robe o' Christ's righteousness on us, an' if we haven't that, bishops or blacksmiths, we mun go stripped an' shamed when we get up out of wer graves wi' never a rag to cover us."

"But how are we supposed to get it?" said Leonard, who could not but feel that Roger's theology, like his life, was quick with warm-blooded vitality.

"Bless you, sir, there's no *getting* about it. The Lord gives us it, and doesn't begrudge us it neither. It isn't how to get it, but do we want it? A bairn doesn't want to suck, I reckon, afore it's born. It isn't till we've struggled through a sense o' need out o' darkness into light, that we begin to hunger and thirst for summut as the Lord's gotten ready to give us. Bless him, he's father an' mother an' all tull us!" exclaimed Roger, with an honest dew in his glad blue eye. "It's wonderful how he tak' tent on every one on us, just as if there wasn't nobbut one to look after. An' bides with us, he does, for all we're so fractious oftens. I takes shame to

myself that I should ever ha' angered or mistrusted him."

"Mistrusted him, Roger? Why, you are the last man I should have thought given to that."

"No more I am, sir, not now. I've gotten a grip o' the hand o' God as the divil 'ud be hard set to make me loose hold on it. He tries at it now and again, but it beats him to do it. He did get the better o' me once, though. It was when our little Easie died. Poor bairn! she'd laid a long time, an' she was never like to be owt but crippled all her life, but for all that, she was my own flesh and blood, an' the only one we had, an' it went hard with me to part with her, it did. I mind coming home the day we left her in the churchyard. It was a Sunday afternoon in June, an' I set me down in the sun on her little white bed, an' looked at the pillow all shook up an' smooth, where her poor bit cheek had used to lie, an' it seemed to me as if earth was empty, and heaven too, nobbut just the little grave as we'd left her lying in. An' I tried hard to pray. A man will allays do that when he's sore gripped wi' grief, whether he does it other times

or not, but it seemed as if there was nowt to pray to; an' then there was a black voice spoke up, an' says it—'If there is a God, why did he let your little Easie die?' An' I'd nowt to say again it. I thought mebby there wasn't, for I seemed to see no signs o' one. Things was as if they went on o' theirselves an' pulled us along wi' them. I was like a man drowning out at sea, wi' nayther stars above nor standing beneath him. An' then summut whispered soft and low, 'Where was ye afore ye was born?' An' wi' that, I like stretched out my hand back through five and thirty year, an' I found it in the hand o' God. An thinks I to mysel', if he was at the pains to make me, I reckon he didn't do it for nowt. He'll none throw me to a side now, an' leave me to take my chance."

There are some grounds on which all men may meet. Leonard looked round into Roger's face just then with a curious sense of fellowship. He, with his six centuries of Norman blood, found this Marton blacksmith telling out in that uncouth dialect of his, the very secrets of his own interior life. Men like Leonard Holdych, whose native

loftiness and reserve dispose them to fence off jealously any approach to confidence on the part of their equals, will often listen with interest to the genuine utterances of those beneath them. The difference of rank rather helps than hinders the freedom of their intercourse.

Leonard suffered the smith to say out all that was in his heart, without feeling that he was in any way compromising himself by doing so. There was even a sort of unconscious strength conveying itself to him, as Roger thus told how he had long ago weathered through all that he was now struggling with himself. He felt a bracing influence, like a breath of mountain air to one who has just emerged from some damp, unwholesome defile.

For we can never come into close contact with a healthy human nature without being the better for it. What food and wine are to the body, this is to that waste of the spirit which in all men is more or less continually going on.

Much in the smith's phraseology was unintelligible to Leonard. Still he gathered enough to make him understand that this man too had

pressed on for a time through doubt and darkness, and had come out at last victoriously into the clear light of truth.

"So you have learned to take life as it comes, and make the best of it, I suppose," said he, when Roger had come to a pause in his narration. "Well, it would be a good thing if every one had notions as sensible as yours about these things. I am afraid there are many who are too much disposed to pick and choose for themselves and quarrel with everything if they cannot meet with just what suits them."

"I daresay, sir, I daresay," returned Roger, "an' I pity em', I do. Them'll nobbut make poorly out that can't be content to walk in the track as the Lord's made for 'em to go in. Mebby it's a bit rough whiles, but it'll bring 'em out right at last, nobbut they go straight on and don't crook about in ways of their own."

He broke off abruptly and started to his feet. The bronze timepiece had just tinkled out the hour of one, and reminded him that hurry as he would, he should be obliged now to keep Marget waiting dinner for him.

Marget had many virtues. Still it must be owned that patience with want of punctuality was not exactly her strongest point. Roger was not afraid of a lecture from his wife if the potatoes chanced to be heavy and the pudding spoiled. Marget never took upon herself to administer anything beyond a silent rebuke if her husband committed any breach of domestic regulations. Roger knew, however, by experience, that on his return, there would probably be a general feeling of uncomfortableness pervading the atmosphere, as if the fortnight's wash or spring cleaning were in process, something at all events enough to take away entirely his relish for his dinner.

True, the present was an occasion which might justify his delinquency. Nevertheless he felt that it behoved him to hasten home with all convenient speed, and accordingly he made his adieu to the Squire with as much alacrity as was consistent with politeness. Then he hurried away to atone, if possible, to his wife, for his tardy return, by a full and particular account of all that had occurred during his visit.

And when he was gone, the Master of Marton Hall felt as if this rude, unlettered Methodist had put into his hands a staff which would help him a little, if but a little, along the rough path which he had to travel.

CHAPTER VII.

SUNDERED.

ONE of Janet's errands that day to Bedesby had been to get for Alison Birney some fine brushes and colours, with other materials requisite in the art of illumination. This was a favourite occupation of Alison's, just suited to call into play her exquisite taste and delicate artistic skill, and enabling her to scatter among her friends those pleasant little remembrances of herself with which it was her delight to furnish them. Janet had also brought with her a supply of traced designs for filling in, and as these were to be returned to the shop on the following day, she was anxious that Alison should see them and select what she wished to keep without delay.

She determined, therefore, to go up with them to the Rectory in the evening, after she and her father had returned; and then the remainder would be ready to be sent back by the Bedesby carrier when he passed the house the next morning.

She hesitated, however, about going, when the servant told her that Mr. Holdych had called while she had been away, and had left word that he would come again in the evening.

It must be something particular, she thought. He was not accustomed to call in the evening; and she puzzled herself in vain to imagine why he was so anxious to see her at once. Something, perhaps, about the jewels she had commissioned him to take. It was useless, however, to speculate on the subject, and it was really necessary that Alison should see and choose the designs. Accordingly she at last decided to set off immediately for the Rectory, and leave a message at the Hall as she passed, to say that she would call there herself on her way home.

That would be the best plan, she considered, on the whole. She would rather, it is true, have

stayed at home to receive him; but that would not be kind to Alison, who was anxious, she knew, to get the designs. She would reach the Rectory just about the time that the Canon's dinner was over. That would allow her a quarter of an hour with Alison, and give her time still to get to the Hall by a little after seven.

She ran upstairs as soon as Mr. Brande had gone back to his study, put on her shawl and light straw hat, and taking her little parcel with her, went gaily down and out into the garden.

The prospect of her walk this delicious summer evening was pleasant in itself, and beyond the thought of gratifying Alison by providing her with the things for which she had been waiting, was another, brooding warmly at her heart, that filled her eyes with a deep quiet light, and parted her lips again and again, as she walked along, with an unconscious smile. Her whole life seemed blossoming around her, every nerve awake and thrilling with delight, every faculty intensified, expanded, to meet the measure of that abounding joy that swelled within her breast. The long, unlighted future stretched before her now all glorious

with hope. Every moment as it came was steeped in happiness. A little longer and she should be with him again ; she should see him, hear him, feel upon her that look which fell like sunshine on her heart, quickening all its latent powers as the warm light of day calls life from out the sleeping earth. For Janet knew that she was loved. She knew that hers was the hand which, clasped in his, should lead this wanderer to rest. And mingling too with all that clinging devotion which forms the essence of a woman's love, there arose a feeling of almost protecting tenderness, such as stirs a mother's heart when she folds once more her lost little one to her breast; and this made her tremble with delight to think that all through life she should be near him, to solace, shield, and strengthen him with that great love of hers.

There was hardly a breath of air stirring as she went along the lane. It was one of those warm, silent evenings, such as often follow on a day of burning heat, when all life seems for the time suspended in the cloudless calm. This hush deepened as she entered the wood. The billowy

masses of fern that spread like a sea of verdure through the glades, were as still as a sleeping lake. The long slender tresses of the silver birch, that quivered in the slightest breeze, hung motionless from the drooping boughs. Even the birds seemed to feel the influence. No song was trilling through the air, only now and then, far away in the depths of the wood, she heard the musical moan of the cushat dove, or the monotonous cawing of the rooks as they circled round their nests. And all the warm, still air was fragrant with the odour of the young pine leaves, and filled with that indescribable soothing hum that always murmurs through the summer woods.

At another time Janet might have been lured to saunter on more slowly, enjoying the bland, delicious air that breathed like balm around her. Just now, however, she was possessed by other thoughts, which made her hasten forward, impatient to reach the Hall before there could be any possibility of Leonard having left for the Priory House.

He never dined till six, she knew; still she would not risk any untoward chance. She left

her message as she passed, and then turned down the cedar walk into the village. Alison was at home, and so unfeignedly delighted to receive the designs for her work, that Janet felt herself abundantly repaid for having brought her them. She could not be prevailed upon, however, to remain when once the selection had been made.

"I have to go to the Hall on my way home, Alison. Mr. Holdych called this morning while we were out, and left word that he should come again this evening, so as I am passing there myself, instead of being at home, I thought I might spare him the walk. You must let me go, indeed. It is nearly seven now."

Alison did not urge her longer to prolong her stay. She did not even, by any significant look or meaning pressure of her hand, intimate that she was more than half aware of all that existed between Janet and Mr. Holdych. There was a perfect reticence about her, a refinement of thought as well as manner, which made her shrink from intruding unasked into the confidence of even her dearest friend. And Janet, on her part, with that sensitive reserve which a deep and

tender love always maintains about itself, had not as yet unveiled to even Alison Birney this new sweet secret of delight which dwelt within her breast.

"I shall come down to-morrow, Janet," said Alison, as she bade her friend good-bye. "Papa is beginning to find fault with me already for not going out enough, so I shall please him and myself too by coming. Can you do with me quite early? It is so hot now if one waits till the middle of the day before going out. Shall you be disengaged?"

"Indeed I shall, if you are coming," said Janet; "and try to stay luncheon, will you? And I will drive you home in the afternoon in the old chaise. That is, if you are not afraid of being seen out in such an elegant conveyance. Promise now, do!" she pleaded, as she stood with her hand upon the gate.

Secretly, Janet was wishing to secure a long, quiet morning with Alison, in hopes that she might be able to bring the conversation round to the one subject that just now was welling up continually in her heart, and confess to her the

story of this new spring of happiness that had risen within her.

She could do it now, for those few words that Leonard had spoken to her the other day had made it possible for her to break the silence she had hitherto preserved. And she was unwilling, too, that Alison should learn from other lips than hers what could hardly be long concealed.

Alison considered a moment and then agreed. "If it be fine, Janet; but see how the clouds have gathered since you came in. I have been sure all day that there was thunder in the air. It has been so sultry and oppressive. I am afraid it looks not unlike a storm now. See yonder, over the wood."

Janet looked in the direction Alison pointed out. Great masses of ragged, sulphur-coloured cloud, deepening into a heavy purple gray, were hanging low over the distant trees. "It does look unpromising," she said; "but it may have time to come down, and be all cleared away before to-morrow morning."

"It will surely not begin before you get home, Janet. Let me fetch you my tweed cloak, it

will turn the rain for awhile if it should come down."

"Oh, no, Alison, pray don't. It will hardly rain, I think, at present, and I shall be home in half-an-hour. See, it is clear sky everywhere, except that little bit over the wood, and the sun is shining quite brightly on the boles of those trees. I shall be safe at home long before it begins."

Alison did not look altogether satisfied. However, she would not press the point, and with a gay good-bye Janet turned out of the Rectory garden, and walked on towards the Hall.

The Lodge gate was standing open, old Margery, the keeper's wife, was sitting knitting outside the door. The low red sunlight that was shining through the boughs of the cedar-trees opposite fell with a ruddy light upon her snow-white cap and withered face. She stood up, and curtsied as Janet gave her a passing smile.

"Bless her bright face," murmured the old woman to herself as she watched her out of sight. "She's as free as daylight. There isn't a one in this place that's fit to be named in the

same breath with her, without it be Miss Alison herself, an' they're as like for goodness as two twin peas in a pod."

Janet went on, unconscious of the benediction that had followed her, her thoughts hovering half with gladness, half with hesitation, around the coming meeting. Once again, as she stood on the Hall steps, waiting for the servant to answer her summons, the wish crossed her mind that she could have remained at home, and received the visit there instead of making it herself. But the next moment she was standing in the library, her hand clasped in Leonard's, and every thought of lingering regret dispersed in the quick rush of joy at feeling herself once more beside him.

"I was so sorry," she began, "that I was out this morning when you called. It was a sudden thought of papa's; some things he wanted to order in Bedesby, and I was glad to have the opportunity of getting a little shopping done. But I thought you were not returning until to-day. You finished your business, then, sooner than you expected."

She paused abruptly. There was something

in his face she could not read just then. Was he not exactly pleased that she should have come to the Hall so late alone? Possibly he saw her hesitation, for in an instant he was just his usual self again. At the first sight of her, looking so joyous and unconscious, knowing himself what she must learn before she left him, he had blenched for a moment at the thought of what he was about to inflict on her and on himself. But now again he had recovered his self-control. There was no want of pleasant ease in his voice as he led her to a seat within the deep oriel window, and answered her inquiries about his journey. Janet sat down, not on the chair he had placed for her, but on the broad ledge that, as in many old-fashioned houses, ran around the inside of the window.

"I prefer this seat, thank you," she said, "there is such a pretty view through that side of the window across the garden. Just look at the sunset light, Mr. Holdych, on the trunks of those trees; how beautiful it is! They glow as if they were on fire. You can see them quite crimson through the leaves. What a fine effect now that

would be for an artist, if he could just seize it as it is!"

Leonard turned his eyes in the direction Janet had pointed out, and then rested them for a moment on the bright face that was lifted to his, to seek there the answer to her own expressions of delight.

"It is very beautiful," he answered, hardly knowing what he said, and then he sat down in the tall carved walnut chair that he had placed for her, and again was silent. The moment had come.

As a man closes his eyes and leaps forward to a certain death, he plunged at once into the confession he had forced himself to make.

"Can you wait awhile?" he said, after a pause, during which Janet was beginning to feel her old embarrassment return. "I have something to tell you which must not be delayed. It was for that I came to you this morning. It is a long story, but it is one you ought to hear."

Janet looked up with a quick, inquiring glance. She was re-assured by the expression in his face. There was nothing there to cause uneasiness, only

a look of deep abounding love, which seemed to shed itself upon her as he held her with his gaze. She rested herself against the stone mullion of the window and listened in silence while he told her of his orphaned childhood, of his eager youth, then of those impetuous years of early manhood, with their unchecked impulses and desultory vague ambition, when the gates of college had closed behind him, and those of active life had not yet opened for him to enter; of the sudden impetus which the appointment he had succeeded in obtaining had given to his half-formed desire to carve out for himself a worthy place in the world. And then he told her how, even when he seemed at last in a position to achieve his object, there had been still a sense of incompleteness in his life, a wild reaching out after something which as constantly eluded his endeavours.

Janet listened quietly as he thus took her over the threshold of his inner life and showed to her the fire that was burning on its hearth. It seemed quite natural that she should know his history. It belonged to her now, and he was giving it to her. Her heart drew very near to

his. Each word, as he went on, was as a fresh thread weaving their two lives together. For not unless she were bound by very close ties to him would Leonard, she well knew, have thus spoken to her of himself. She sat toying unconsciously with a [illegible] spray of jessamine that lay across the open casement in the triple arch of the window, gazing out with a far-off, dreamy expression in her countenance, away over the distant woods which girdled in the park, their dark, spear-like tops standing up sharp and black against the yellow gleam of the sunset sky. The crimson flush had faded from the trunks of the beeches, and the twilight shadows were gathering already beneath the level branches of the cedars on the lawn. For a moment Leonard ceased, and leaned back his head upon the faded velvet cushion of the chair. Janet did not turn or speak. She almost feared to breathe, lest she should dim the clear image of her happiness. It was a pause of utter, limitless content. She seemed floating as if on a flood of languid light, away, away, she knew not whither. Looking out thus with quiet, unheeding gaze across to the dark woods beyond the park, her

face half-hidden in the crimson shadow of the curtain, Janet did not see the fixed, rigid expression that was gradually tightening over Leonard's, as though he were pressing resolutely down the feelings that would force their way to the surface. The lips compressed themselves until they were completely hidden beneath the thick curls of the meeting beard, his eyes shone out from under the knitted brows with a dark, fierce light, as from some fire within. Suddenly, with an unconscious gesture, such as great inward suffering will often cause, he stretched out his arm over the side of his chair towards Janet. She put her hand half-timidly in his. It closed quickly, tightly over it, and then startled by the strong pressure, looking up for the first time since they had sat down together, she saw his face.

The sight of it struck a sudden terror into her heart. Instead of that lull of happiness, came a nameless dread, a sickening sense of apprehension, that seemed, for an instant, to stay the very blood in her veins. It was like going at once out of some flower-filled conservatory, where the warm air is thick

with balsam, to meet the chill damp blast of a November night.

She half-rose from her low seat in the window, her eyes full of the unspoken questionings which her parted lips refused to frame. The pressure of Leonard's hand upon her own held her down. Silently, she suffered herself to be restrained. That face so full of self-control could not but repress all outward sign of agitation in herself.

"Janet!" said Leonard, in a low hoarse whisper, which seemed forced up from some great depth within.

Her hand trembled under his. It was the first time he had called her by her name. The first time! Ah, how dear to the woman who loves, is the first time when she hears, in lingering doubtful accents, this sacred home-name pronounced by one whose lips make all speech sweet to her! How sweet the trembling consciousness of a new nearness which the utterance of that one word has brought!

Janet heard it, but no thrill of shy delight flushed her cheek with joy; rather, it sounded as a

strain of sweet music might do in the ears of one in deadly pain. She looked up with more intense anxiety upon her face, waiting for what still she feared to hear. The tone in which that one word had been spoken had revealed to her the amount of suffering that lay behind. She calmed herself at once, gathering up her forces to sustain, not herself alone, but him.

Something she had to hear; what it might be she could not yet divine, but let the truth be what it might, nothing, as she thought just then, could possibly be worse than this terrible suspense. She laid her other hand upon the one that held her own, with a soft, caressing gesture, as if she would strengthen him thus with this great love of hers. She did not know—how should she yet?—that her gentle solace did but add still further to his pain.

Again he took up the thread of his story. He told her now of the golden-haired beauty who had crossed his path. Young, imperial and poor, a governess in the family of a Scottish nobleman. Of his own wild love for the girl, of his passionate resolve to win her for his wife, of her reluctant

yielding to the suit so madly urged, and then of their hasty marriage, of her death, as all supposed, and of that haunting dread which no reasoning with his doubts had ever quite allayed.

In an instant Janet understood it all. "She is living still?" she whispered, in a steelly voice.

"I saw her in London."

For a long time again there was silence between the two, the silence of a quite passionless despair. Then, slowly, Janet rose from her seat; "I must go now," she said, wearily, "it grows late." Leonard took her hands, chill and trembling as they were, and held them for a moment both in his. He stood awhile, looking down into the pale, passive face before him, and then the pent-in love burst forth, like the waters of a mountain stream, which a sudden thaw has swelled to a resistless flood. The icy barriers gave way. For a moment he held her as though no power on earth should wrench her from his arms, and then, quietly, he unloosed his hold, and folding both her hands in his, stood, gazing down again into her face.

Janet never forgot that look. It seemed to

draw forth all her soul to meet his own, as the sun, looking down through the pine branches, drinks up the dew from the moss about its roots.

"Janet," he said, in a voice that filled her, in its quietness, with strength, "we belong to one another, do we not?"

Janet did not speak, only drooped her head a little lower before him.

"Then we shall never quite lose one another. Remember, Janet, you are mine. If the time should never come when I can claim you in this life, I shall seek you in the next."

There was no suffering now, nor agitation in his countenance or voice. The bitterness of parting had passed away in the fervour of that first and last embrace. Beneath his look, Janet felt herself sustained and soothed.

"Life is not so long. We can wait," she said, softly.

"We must wait," he repeated, and then, together, they went home through the wood. It was too late now for Janet to return alone. Instead of five or ten minutes, as she had intended when first she went, she had been far on to two

hours at the Hall. The red sunlight had long ago died out. The twilight was deepening fast to-night, and over all the heavens the dark cloud had spread, that she had seen hanging over the wood as she had stood at the Rectory gate. The air was still, even now, but it was the lifeless hush that comes before a storm. Neither Leonard nor Janet, however, noticed the threatening aspect of the sky. If they had seen the sun shining as at noon-day, when they came out together, it would hardly have struck them with surprise. They walked along, side by side, in silence, until they reached the middle of the wood. It was all dim and shadowy now. No long blue vistas, crossed with bars of golden light, stretching away on every side, but dense gloom beneath the dark branches of the pines, which closed over head, so as completely to hide from them the lowering sky.

All at once great drops of rain came pattering loudly down upon the roof of leaves above them.

They heard the sound distinctly as they went slowly on, their footsteps muffled by the thick carpet of moss and fallen fir leaves on which

they trod. Involuntarily, they quickened their pace, and for a time, protected by the sheltering trees, felt nothing of the shower which was coming heavily down. Before long, however, the rain had forced its way through the wet leaves, and was pouring fast upon them. They hurried on, but every moment it fell more and more heavily, and by the time they had reached the gate that opened into the lane, Janet's dress was soaked with wet.

"Do not come any farther," she begged, as Leonard pushed open the gate, "you will be quite wet through, and I do not mind going down the lane alone." Her own damp garments she would not have noticed, yet, woman-like, these trifling cares for another's comfort engaged her attention even now, while her very heartstrings were still quivering with the cruel shock which they had just received.

Leonard only answered by closing the gate behind him and joining her again. He must see her safe home, and then—his mind was filled with one thought only. After this parting he must see Janet no more. During that silent

walk beside her his resolution had been taken. If he stayed behind, her presence, so near, would be as a magnet disturbing every fixed resolve. Already he had proved his weakness—he dare not trust himself again. He must tear himself away, and that at once. If he had not yielded to that wild impulse to clasp her to his breast he might have still remained. And yet, could he bear to be without the memory of that moment when he had held her thus, and when, in the silence that had fallen between them, he had felt in his inmost soul how pure and strong was that love she bore to him?

The rain had nearly ceased when they stood at last before the gate in the tall beech hedge around the Priory House garden. Still a thick canopy of broken clouds overspread the sky, through which, high up, only a faint gleam of moonlight caught here and there upon their ragged edges.

The old house stood, a brown shadow beyond the trees. One long streak of light came through the closed shutters of Mr. Brande's study. Everything else was gray and dim in the murk. The last moment had come. Leonard would go no

farther. For a moment as he stood outside the gate he held her hand again in his. In his heart he was taking his last farewell. This parting was very bitter. She was his, he knew it, honestly won and dearly prized, yet he must give her up.

"Remember, Janet," he repeated, "you are mine."

Janet could not speak. Her lips were trembling too much to frame any word in answer. She only looked up at him through the dim light, with eyes in which all the love and sorrow in her heart told their tale. And then he let go her hand and turned away. He was alone again now—*alone !*

CHAPTER VIII.

DE PROFUNDIS.

MRS. CLYDE went mechanically down the walk, through the shrubbery leading to the side door of the house. Now that she found herself alone, the strength with which Leonard's presence had for the time inspired her, fell once more away, leaving instead a weight of dull despair, that pressed down heavily all thought and feeling into one vague consciousness of hopeless wretchedness. She lifted the iron knocker on the door and rapped. The sound fell upon her ears as if from some world outside herself. Letty opened to her, and then, as if in a dream, she walked forward into the house.

Her father was just coming out of his study.

He had heard her knock and wondered whether she had been walking home through the storm. Her lengthened absence had surprised him somewhat. Still, supposing she had been staying at the Rectory, he had not given himself much concern about it.

"Have you walked home through all this rain, Janet?" he inquired. "Why, you must be wet through."

She felt her damp clothes.

"So they are. I had not noticed. I must go upstairs and change them. Good night, papa. I think I shall not come down again."

He gave her his good night greeting, not quite so absently though as usual, and then looked at her for a moment somewhat anxiously.

"You have not taken cold, Janet, I hope. You are all in a shiver. Make haste and get these damp things off, and let Letty light you a fire and bring you some hot wine and water."

There was a tone of careful solicitude in his manner as he spoke thus to Janet, which in part relaxed the unnatural tension of her mind.

"Don't be uneasy, papa," she said, "I shall

take no harm, I daresay. A night's rest will make all right."

He looked scarcely satisfied by her assurance.

"Let Lettice bring you some wine at once."

"I don't need it, thank you," she replied, "I will take it though if you wish. You can bring me some, Letty, immediately."

And then, lighting one of the candles that stood on the hall table, she went up to her room and shut herself in with her grief. By the time she had taken off her wet shawl and dress, Letty had returned, bringing in a tray with some wine and biscuits on it.

"Just set the tray down, Letty, and take away these things to dry. I don't want anything more. You can go now. I shall not need you to-night. You need not light the fire; I am not cold."

Poor Janet! she was feeling nothing just then except the misery within.

Letty lingered for a moment, folding together the laces her mistress was taking off, and laying in their cases the gold coil bracelet, the watch and clasp.

The girl felt there was something wrong, though she knew not how to express her sympathy.

"Shall I unfasten your hair, ma'am?" she asked, hoping that she should be told, as she often was, to stay and brush down the long abundant tresses.

"No, Letty, no; not to-night. You can go now. I will ring if I want anything more."

The girl went out, closing the door softly after her, and then Janet, alone again, wrapped her white dressing-gown around her, and, with a gesture of hopeless weariness, sat down in the great carved chair that stood in the recess beside the window, and let loose the thoughts which had been held in till now.

Poor Janet! From that chamber she had gone forth a few hours ago, so rich, so full of hope and faith, wearing so proudly the purple robe of love. She had come back to it, beggared, stripped of all. Every detail of that terrible evening started up before her. As in a panorama, the scenes of those eventful hours passed through her excited brain. She closed her eyes, pressing

down her fingers tightly over them, as though she would shut out the tormenting vision. But still the image of Leonard sat facing her, his countenance still and rigid as when he had been telling her that fatal story. Every word, as it had fallen from his lips, was imprinted with cruel accuracy on her memory. She could have repeated them all just as she had heard them.

Then for an instant she felt that long look of his, falling like sunlight on her soul. With a wild gesture, as though to bid away the phantom joy, she started from her chair and began pacing hurriedly up and down the room. Then again she cowered down in her seat as if she would hide even from herself. Her grief clung round her. She could not shake it off nor look on it apart. It seemed to tighten over her until her brain felt ready to burst with the intolerable pressure. No tears came to cool her throbbing eyeballs; not even a moan issuing from her lips bore away its share of suffering from the overburdened heart. She sat there, chilled and shivering, yet with no energy to move, her hands lying nervelessly upon her lap, her being all unstrung; just passively

enduring, till at last, nature, wrung by her misery to pity, laid her hand upon the quivering strings, and the relief which in no other way could come, Janet found in unconsciousness.

CHAPTER IX.

SUNDAY AT HOME.

ON Sunday morning, Jessie was awakened by the sound of a cheery voice, singing lustily in the garden below her window. It was Roger, who was walking up and down in the sunshine, with his hands in his pockets, looking at the flowers in the gay little borders, pausing now and then to examine the apricots that were ripening against the cottage wall, or to note the growth of the huge, yellow apples on the espaliers that lined the walls. All the time he was rolling out in his deep-toned bass accents that grand old hymn of Milton's :—

> "Let us with a gladsome mind,
> Praise the Lord, for he is kind,
> For his mercies aye endure,
> Ever faithful, ever sure."

Roger always got up in good time on a Sunday morning. It was the best day of the week to him, and he liked to make the most of it. He did not hold what are called "Sabbatarian views" with regard to its observance. Indeed, "views" of any kind were not much in Roger's line. Perhaps some very excellent people might even consider his conduct in this particular rather lax than otherwise. He believed, however, that Sunday was a day, not to yawn and sit still in, but to serve God and be glad in, and to the best of his ability he acted accordingly.

Apparently the words he was singing served as a convenient vehicle for the expression of his emotions on this occasion, for he went over them again and again, as if he enjoyed the repetition,

> "For his mercies aye endure,
> Ever faithful, ever sure."

Sometimes Jessie caught a whole line quite distinctly; then the sound became fainter as he got farther down the walk, or ceased entirely as he stooped down to examine more carefully some

peculiarly fine specimen on his trees, and then again swelled up more loudly into the little chamber.

Jessie lay listening for a few minutes. Then she got up and dressed, and ran down into the kitchen. The fire was lighted, just beginning to blaze up under the kettle that was hanging over it from the polished reckon. Everything looked trim and neat. Her aunt was nowhere to be seen. Jessie gave a glance around, and seeing nothing that seemed to need her hand, ran out into the garden to her uncle.

"What, here's the little blue bird," said Roger, stopping his singing as Jessie danced lightly up, and lifted her rosy lips for her morning's kiss. "Why, there isn't a bonnier flower in all t' garden, I'll be bound, nor this here. See here, Jessie, did you ever see a little tree so loadened as this? I've counted six an' twenty apples on it, an' its nobbut the second year o' bearing."

"There'll be a deal o' fruit, uncle, this year. I was looking round yesterday. More by half than

you'll want to use. What a quantity there is on that Ribston! Why the branches are like ropes of onions, they're so full."

"Ay," said Roger, rubbing his hands as he looked at the bowing branches. "That's the Lord's tree. I gev it to him that year as you went away, an' all as comes off on it is His. Why, last year we made better nor two pound ten off o' that tree, an' we got a mangle for that widow Reeves, her as had her husband killed tummelling back'ards off a scaffold at Bedesby. An' five childer she had, an' not a penny afore-hand when she'd got him buried decent."

"Poor thing! I know you sent me word he had got killed," said Jessie, compassionately. "It was a good thing for her as the tree had a good crop that year."

She stooped down and gathered into her apron a number of apples that had fallen beneath the tree. She ran with them into the house, and then returning to her uncle, put her little hand within his arm and paced up and down the walk beside him, talking as she went, till Marget, appearing at the cottage door, put an end to their

conversation and their walk together by calling them in to breakfast.

How pleasant it was to Jessie, going to church on this first Sunday at home, with her uncle and aunt, sitting in the old black pew and listening to the well-remembered tones of the good Canon's voice—looking round, too, at the familiar faces, changed, some of them, since last she had seen them there; others showing no traces of the lapse of years! She was disappointed, though, at not seeing Mrs. Clyde. The pew belonging to the Priory House was empty. She could not be ill, Jessie thought, for she had seen her only the evening before, going through the Lodge gates on her way to the Rectory. She was disappointed, too, a little, in Mr. Holdych. He was not nearly so pleasant looking as she had expected, and he looked straight before him all the time with such a stern, set look upon his face. Marget said, however, when they got home that she had never seen him so before. Perhaps he had got knocked up with his journey, Roger said, and he hadn't overgot it yet.

But Jessie did not concern herself long about

the squire. There were too many pleasant things to think and talk about on that happy Sunday, for her to give much heed to him. They were talking so cosily together, all three of them, as they sat in the arbour at the bottom of the garden, that Jessie felt almost sorry when the church bell chimed out half after two, and they had to go in to get ready for preaching.

It was full twenty minutes' walk, for Farmer Brighouse's barn was at the farther end of the village, just where it opened out upon the Haxby road. Roger always liked to be there a few minutes before they began, so there was not much time to spare. Jessie could not help giving a little final glance in the glass before she went out of her room. It was just possible that Reuben Leaf might be there. Her aunt had said that he came over sometimes on a Sunday to the mill, and though Jessie repeated to herself that he was nothing now to her, still she was glad to see how fair was the fresh young face, that she saw in the oval mirror that stood on her little dressing-table.

It was a warm walk down the village just in

the middle of the afternoon, and Jessie was glad to get to the end of it, and sit down to rest on one of the benches in Farmer Brighouse's great barn. It was cool and pleasant there. There were no windows for the hot sun to shine in at, and the great folding-doors at the side were standing open wide, letting in both light and air.

One end of the barn was piled up with trusses of straw, and below these were rows of benches brought in for the occasion, on which the congregation sat. At the other end was a deal table, and behind it a chair, which served as a pulpit for the preacher. Jessie watched the congregation enter one by one, and take their places on the benches. By-and-bye came Mr. and Mrs. Leaf and the preacher with them. Reuben was not there though, and seeing that, Jessie gave over looking round, and felt as if there was nothing now to distract her attention from the service which was just beginning.

She sang up with her clear sweet treble, in the hymns, of which her uncle started the tune. She followed the minister in his prayer, and listened as he read out the chapter in the Bible that lay

before him on the table. Perhaps his accent and pronunciation were not quite faultless, but that was of no great consequence, for no one there would have known if it had been pure enough to have satisfied the most fastidious ear. But he read in a clear, simple way, as though he wanted to make his hearers understand the meaning of the words, and then he preached a plain, hearty sort of sermon, to which Jessie listened all the way through without once thinking of Reuben Leaf.

When all was over, and the last hymn sung, and the congregation had pretty nearly all dispersed, they went in a little group—she and the minister, her aunt and uncle, and Mr. and Mrs. Leaf—home to the mill to tea. They had not far to go, for although the mill was some little distance out of Marton, on the Haxby road, yet Mr. Brighouse's barn was itself quite on the outskirts of the village.

Jessie walked along silently. Her aunt and Mrs. Leaf were talking together, and her uncle was deep in the relation of his recent interview with the squire. She was looking round her at the well-remembered outlines of the distant hills,

which at the turn of the road could be distinctly seen over the long range of level land that lay in that direction. Just the same blue lines and broken peaks, with dense dark woods of pine and fir straggling down into the bit of furzy common that stretched at their feet, a long strip of waste land with purple heath flushing it to a softened bloom, and mottled by patches of gorse, not bright now with their golden blossoms, but black and sombre, lifting into light the beaming sky and distant hills.

By-and bye they came on to the high towing-path that led along by the side of the river, and so for a little way they went along, with the glancing stream on one side, and on the other the sunny autumn fields, green pasture lands with sheep dotted over them and kine lying on the ground, peacefully chewing the cud, or corn-fields waving now with golden grain, just ready to be cut. Here and there in the hedgerow was a huge elm or sycamore, casting cool shadows on the ground, or a five-barred gate with cattle rubbing their heads upon the topmost rail, and gazing out lazily into the road. Then they came to the

mill-dam and the bridge. Jessie listened to the quiet babble of the water over the bar, heard distinctly in the Sabbath stillness, for the deafening roar of the great mill-wheel was hushed now, and everything seemed slumbering in the warm sunlight.

Again as the well-known familiar objects met her eye, her thoughts wandered away to those old days when she used to come here with her aunt to get tea with Mrs. Leaf, and she remembered with something like a sigh, how pleasant it had been, walking up and down the mill garden with Reuben by her side, feeling that shy, fluttering consciousness of his regard, that once had lain so warmly at her heart.

That was all over now. Jessie almost wondered at herself that she should be thinking so quietly of what once had stirred her being to its very depths. And yet she felt as if something had long been dead within her, and as though her life had lost, through this indifference, what once had grown so gladly with it.

She had not much time, however, for indulging the reflections which the sight of the old

house by the mill had inspired. They had reached the white wicket-gate, and Mrs. Leaf, going before them, opened it and led the way through the garden—bright now with its wealth of autumn flowers—round to the front door. It was only on state occasions like the present that this front door was used. The great door leading out of the yard into the kitchen, and so through the house, served all ordinary purposes, and Jessie, with the instinct of old-remembered custom, began to feel something of a "company air," as she walked after the rest up the path leading to the trellised porch at the front of the house.

Another moment and the door was opened by some one from within. There was a great shaking of hands and bustle of welcome and inquiry, and then Jessie found herself standing within the vine-covered porch, and felt her hand in a sudden clasp, and heard Reuben's voice, saying, "Here's old friends, you see, to welcome you."

She looked up quickly at him, shaken out of her quietness by this first surprise of meeting. He seemed hardly changed a bit, she thought. Just the same tall, broad-chested young man that she

remembered of old, only that his brown beard grew more thickly over his face, and his voice had an easier tone, and altogether his air was more assured and manly than it used to be in those days so long ago.

"We may as well go up and get our things off at once," said Mrs. Leaf, leading the way upstairs to the "best lodging-room," where she left her visitors for awhile to take off their shawls and bonnets, and arrange themselves after their walk, for tea.

Jessie twisted the sunny curls round her fingers, and arranged the blue ribbon about her neck, and fastened the little cornelian brooch in the bosom of her frock more carefully than she would have liked to have acknowledged even to herself. By the time that all was in readiness, and Marget had unpinned her best quilled cap from the paper in which it had come under her shawl, and had adjusted it properly over her smooth gray hair, Mrs. Leaf had come back and was ready to conduct them down stairs into the front parlour.

Reuben was there, standing beside the window,

and Roger and Mr. Leaf and the preacher, who were talking still about the new chapel, and the readiness with which the "members" had come forward with their contributions.

The tea-table was already spread, for there was not long space between the afternoon service and that in the evening. Mrs. Leaf unlocked the door of the corner cupboard, and took out thence two or three glass saucers full of preserved fruits, which she put down upon the table. Then she gave two or three little touches to the arrangement of the plates, and went out to Nancy in the kitchen to superintend further operations there.

Jessie was glad when she came back, followed by Nancy with the teapot and hot cakes, and the little stir began of settling down in their places to the table. She had felt it awkward sitting still with her hands folded in her lap; and somehow, though Reuben had taken a chair and sat down beside them, as though he felt it his duty to be attentive to his mother's guests, neither of them had seemed to have very much to say. But when tea really began, and every one was talking round

the table, the little feeling of uneasiness passed away. It was very pleasant to listen to the conversation that was going on, and to answer the inquiries of Mrs. Leaf about the great chapels to which she had been in London.

"Such splendid places they are, some of them," she said, "with the ceiling all painted so beautiful, and gilded columns and polished mahogany pulpits, and the pews all carpeted and cushioned and lined with crimson cloth. They look really quite splendid by gaslight."

"Why, they must be more like playhouses than chapels," exclaimed Mrs. Leaf. "I know I was in that at Bedesby once, afore I was married; and it was just like what you say, except the pulpit."

"Ay, they wouldn't be wanting a pulpit in a playhouse, I reckon," said Roger. "But that isn't as it ought to be. They're losing the simplicity o' the Gospel, I doubt, wi' so much finery. It doesn't become Metherdisses to have the likes o' that in their chapels. It's a bad sign when they come to think so much o' outside show."

"It is a pity, Mr. Lee," remarked the miller, "an' I can't say as I approve of it myself. I know I were in one o' them fine chapels once when I were in London, an' I'd a sight sooner ha' been in church. I couldn't keep my eyes off o' t' painting an' things as there was to see, an' it made me while I could take in nowt o' t' sermon. I allays says, says I, crimson pew Methodism, an' bare bench Methodism, is two different things. Give me the bare bench Methodism, an' let them take up wi' t'other as likes it. It doesn't suit my way o' thinking."

Mr. Leaf set down his cup in his saucer decisively, as if he had said all that needed to be said upon the question, and his wife, taking the hint, thinking too that perhaps the preacher might not altogether approve of such sweeping criticism, even from "members of society," adroitly changed the subject, and began to talk to Jessie of the changes that there had been in the village since she went away.

CHAPTER X.

THE OLD LOVE.

THERE was not much time to spare after tea. Mr. Leaf asked Mr. Weston if he would like to step into the back parlour for awhile before they started. He knew that he always liked to have a little time to think over his sermon before he gave it. For be it known that Methodist preachers are not able, like others, to carry about their discourses in the pockets of their coats, neatly stitched up in limp black covers. They must convey them, till they reach their hearers' ears, in a more uncertain, if in a more effective fashion, partly in their heads and partly in their hearts.

"And now, Jessie," said Mrs. Leaf, when the minister was fairly shut up by himself, "shall we

take a turn in the garden? You haven't seen it yet."

Jessie could not help noticing how attentive Mrs. Leaf appeared to be to her. So different, she thought, from the distant way in which she had begun to treat her just before she went away.

A wicked little thought came into her mind. "No doubt," she argued with herself, "it is because Reuben is going to marry this Miss Julia Stabler, and so his mother isn't afraid any longer of his taking up with me. She thinks, I suppose, she can afford to be civil now again. She isn't afraid of doing any mischief by it."

Jessie let the thought work itself about within her breast. It made her assume a slight air of independence towards Mrs. Leaf, and caused her to feel less disposed than before to meet the advances of Reuben, who was evidently desirous of making himself agreeable to her.

But Jessie drew herself up with a pretty pride. She would not seem interested when he showed her the new hives with glass windows in their sides, that stood beneath the straw-thatched shed

at the bottom of the garden. Nor would she give more than a careless admiration to the beds of rare annuals, which just now were in their full beauty of bloom. And yet she could not help feeling uncomfortable all the time. It was so different from those happy garden strolls that she and Reuben used to take together before Mrs. Leaf had begun to be so cool, and the people in the village to gossip so about them. She felt more ready by far to cry than to smile, when Mrs. Leaf, with all the pride of an amateur, drew attention to her floral treasures. And when they had got dressed and had set out again to the preaching, it was no better. Reuben came round to her side when they were ready for starting, and walked along with her all the way to the barn.

"He behaved badly to me once," thought Jessie to herself with a swelling heart, "and I'll take good care he shan't have the chance to do the same again."

So the more Reuben seemed anxious to entertain her, the more Jessie drew herself up, and tried to answer coldly and indifferently to his remarks.

They were a little late in getting to the barn. The preacher had walked quickly on before with Mr. Leaf, and just as they entered, he was rising to give out the hymn. The place was nearly full, a space only being left for them on two of the front benches. Reuben stood by to let Jessie pass to her seat, and then, seeing that there was just room left, he moved up himself, and took the one next to her.

He was not sorry to have the chance of sitting close beside her, but Jessie, though there was no cause for indignation, felt not a little vexed to think that every one would see them standing thus together.

She looked very straight before her, and finding her place in her hymn book, stood up to sing. Just then a stranger came in, a respectable looking old lady, and took a seat that was left vacant on the bench immediately before them. She had no hymn book with her. Reuben noticed this, and seeing her to be a stranger, he handed her his own. She took it with a pleasant smile, not perceiving that it was the one

he was using himself. He was without one now, and Jessie felt more and more awkward. She could not very well help offering him a share of hers, and yet how disagreeable it would be! She would rather a great deal do without one at all herself. However, she pushed her book towards him. He gave her a bright look of thanks, and moved a little nearer still that they might both look on together.

It was very little that Jessie knew of what went on during the rest of the service. Two sets of feelings were struggling hard within her. That old fluttering sense of happy nearness, her heart trembling towards him as the needle to the pole; and the jealous bitterness at the thought of this Julia Stabler, making her resolve she would not let him trifle with her again.

He should see, she determined, that she could make him keep his distance now; and with that thought Jessie drew up her little head, and resolved, with all her might, to make him feel she did not care a bit about him now, and that whether he married this Julia Stabler or not, it made no difference to her.

When all was over, and the congregation were dispersed, Jessie, and her aunt and uncle, took leave of the Leafs. Reuben, however, stood still.

"I think I'll set you a piece o' way home," said he. "It's a moonlight night, an' I shan't want to be starting back to Haxby yet a bit."

Marget tried to dissuade him. "It's a pity," she said, "sic a ride as ye have afore ye, an' we'll do fine with ourselves."

But Jessie said nothing. She would just let Reuben see that she did not care about it one way or the other. If he was wanting to get another walk with her, she would take care that he should not enjoy it.

And he did not enjoy it either. For Jessie hardly spoke once all the way, unless he actually put some question to her, and even then she answered him as shortly as she could. Reuben, however, fancied it might be shyness. Jessie never was very much of a talker, and he only tried the more to draw her out. He did want just to make her talk to him as once she used to do. But it was all in vain, and when they

reached the gate of Roger's garden, she was just as quiet as when first they started.

Roger asked Reuben to go in with them, but this he refused to do.

"I must get back home as fast as I can now, or mother 'll be waiting supper o' me. She allays reckons to have something a bit extra on a Sunday night when I come. Not as I care about it much myself, but it pleases her, doing of it."

He held out his hand to Jessie for a moment. She thought at first she would not notice him, then she gave him hers. It was no use looking particular, but she drew it away directly. He should not keep hold of it as he seemed disposed to do. And then she ran up the garden into the cottage, leaving her uncle and aunt to say good-bye, and follow at their leisure.

Jessie could not sleep that night. She resolutely closed her eyes, but her thoughts went on as busily as ever. She grew impatient, half angry with herself. Why should she concern herself in any way about Reuben? He was nothing to her, she was nothing to him. And

yet poor Jessie found herself mentally wincing at the thought. There was this Miss Julia Stabler, and though she tried hard to spurn the thought of Reuben as a lover for herself, she felt it half an injury that he should be taking up with anybody else.

She was piqued. She tried to set herself against him. She recalled all she had suffered from what Mrs. Green had told her about the Marton gossip. It was all his fault, she said to herself. Why had he come about her in the way that he had, and set people's tongues going by it, when he meant nothing all the time? It was cruel, wicked in him. True, she did not care about it any longer. Marton had ceased to be the boundary of her little world, and the sayings and doings of its inhabitants were not of much consequence to her now. She had grown out of it all long since. Still, she could very well remember how miserable she had felt at the time, and in her thoughts she went over all the circumstances of her trouble and disappointment.

She almost wished she had not been so civil to Reuben to-night. Next time she saw him

she would keep a still stricter watch over herself, and let him see more plainly, that if he had behaved badly to her once, she cared not the least bit in the world about him now.

And thus "nursing her wrath to keep it warm," poor Jessie fell asleep at last.

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH MEG'S FEELINGS ARE HURT.

WHILE poor little Jessie was thus doing her best to rub up her grievances and incense herself against her old admirer, Reuben was riding slowly home on his brown mare Meg, who trotted at a leisurely pace along the well-known road, as though perfectly aware that her master was too much absorbed in his own reflections to pay much regard to the rate at which she was proceeding.

He, too, like Jessie, was feeling, as Mr. Weston might have expressed it, "considerably exercised in his mind." The sight of Jessie had been like a spark thrown among tinder, rekindling to almost its old intensity the flame long smouldering in his heart.

Reuben's was one of those impulsive, yet persistent natures, not unfrequently to be met with among the ruddy, robust yeomanry of England, which blaze up into a sudden passion like a beacon on the hills, and then as suddenly die down again, a heap, apparently, of dull grey ashes; while all the time there may be a core of heat beneath, waiting only for a gust of wind and a relay of fuel, to light up again, intense and vivid as at first.

And the old love had been revived once more, the old dreams had come back, dear as ever they had been. He had trembled again as he stood beside her; he had felt that light touch thrill him through; he had longed just as he used to do to win a glance from the blue eyes, and a smile from the rosy lips. He thought, as he rode along, of Julia Stabler, with her saucy black eyes, and loud voice, and bold, handsome face, and then of Jessie's soft shy look and gentle ways, of the little hand that had lain in his own for an instant when he parted from her at her uncle's gate, and of the bright curls that clustered so thickly around that precious head.

How he hated the bailiff's daughter just then! He felt sure Jessie would get to hear of what he knew very well was talked about, both at Haxby and Marton. True, July had forced herself upon him, she had waylaid him when he went out, and always laid claim to him at tea-parties and dances. She had held him with her boisterous talk, so that he could hardly get away from her even if he wished, and yet Reuben knew very well that, after all, he had not been quite clear in the matter himself. He never meant to marry the girl. He had been honest when he had told his mother that, but he had made it easier than he need for her to hang after him in the way that she had. He had done a good deal to make her think that her attentions were rather agreeable to him than otherwise. And now he felt sure she would not so easily be shaken off. He struck his spurs sharply into the mare's flank as the thought thrust at him sore. She was high-spirited and sensitive, accustomed to be treated with consideration even by her master. Perhaps the unexpected sting offended her, perhaps she was only startled by it out of the brown study

into which, like him, she had seemed to have fallen. At any rate, she gave a sudden plunge, reared up on her hind legs as though she were about to perform a *pas seul* for her own special benefit, and in an instant Reuben was off her back, and lying, blind with pain, upon a great heap of stones that had been carted down at the side of the road.

The mare did not wait to see what had been the consequence of her hasty freak, but feeling herself at liberty, she trotted off again, the bridle and stirrups dangling as she went, until she reached the great gate that opened into her master's stable-yard. There she stopped, in no hurry apparently to get in, until a lad who was passing by, saw her standing loose and riderless in the road, and guessing something was the matter, gave the alarm to the servants in the house.

"She's been an' gone an' thrown him, as sure as I'm alive," cried Tim, the foreman, running half dressed out of the house. Tim had been in bed and asleep for the last two hours, when he was roused up by the intelligence that Meg had come back without her master. He was a steady-

going fellow, not given to boosing in the "Public" on a Sunday night, and being destitute of that resource, what else can a farming man, who has no sweetheart to visit, do but go to bed when daylight is gone?

He clattered down the yard in his big hob-nailed boots, heaving a loose brace over his shoulder as he came along.

"Nobbut wait a minute," said he, when he got to the gate, and saw Meg standing sleek and quiet beside it, holding down her pretty head, while the lad held the bridle in his hand, "nobbut wait while I get my coat, and I'll ride her back o' t' road she's comed. She's chucked him off, I lay, somewhere atween here and Marton."

"Noo, haud still, you vixen," he grumbled, as he returned a minute or two after, with his toilet in a rather more advanced stage of completion. "It's a bad neet's work you've made wi' your kranky ways, and folk all in bed and sleeping. Aye, you've gotten cotched yoursel', you mun wait for your corn, if that's what you're after, and sarve you right, you brute. Noo, then, off wi' you," and Tim started away with a

cut of his whip that made the mare swerve aside, and then set off down the Marton road like an arrow from a bow.

It was long past midnight when poor Reuben, groaning at every step, was carried upstairs, and laid in his mother's spare room, on the bed where it seemed likely he would be held a prisoner for some time to come. Tim had found him just about half-way on the road, and wisely judging that he would be better tended at the mill than in his own house, had gone forward there with the intelligence, instead of returning to the farm at Haxby.

The Marton doctor was not very skilful. He possessed in perfection one only of the three attributes of a surgeon, namely, the lion's heart. With the other two, the eagle's eye and the lady's hand, he was, unfortunately for his patients at least, but sparingly endowed. He came up the stairs after Mrs. Leaf, looking somewhat cross and sleepy. Like Tim, he had been roused up just when he had got comfortably asleep, and had not yet got over the effect of this trial to his temper. He brightened up, however, when he approached the bed. It would be a difficult case,

he saw at once; of that he was not afraid. It would also be, in all probability, a somewhat tedious one, and to that he had no objection. He had Reuben's coat cut off. It was his best to be sure, but that could not be helped. Then he pinched his patient till he found out, partly by the sharpness of his groans, or the grimaces by which his face became contorted, where the mischief lay.

It was a dislocated shoulder, and one or two bad bruises into the bargain. Clearly the first thing to do was to get the joint back again into its place, and accordingly Mr. Stinson intimated the same to Mrs. Leaf, who was standing holding the candle, and anxiously awaiting the result of his examination.

She had winced and shrunk at each thrust and touch of that pitiless hand upon her son. She shuddered now at the thought of what he must still further undergo.

"It must be done, Mrs. Leaf, and done at once. The longer we put off the job, the tougher it will be; you see the inflammation is increasing every moment, and it is that which causes the difficulty."

There was nothing to be said. It had to be done, and Mrs. Leaf busied herself in getting the doctor what he needed for the operation.

"Now then," said he, when all was ready, "don't alarm yourself, I beg. It will be over directly when once we begin. Just a pull, and a little twinge or so; nothing to be afraid of—nothing, I assure you."

Mrs. Leaf was a brave little woman, but when it was over, she went downstairs into the kitchen and fainted right away. Reuben's groan at the "little twinge" which the doctor's pull had caused, had been just too much for her. He might have been tearing her own heart out, so sharp was the pain she felt.

She soon came round, however. Mrs. Leaf was not one to give way under such circumstances more than was absolutely necessary; and now she sat up, took a drink from the glass of brandy-and-water which her husband put to her lips, and five minutes after she had come down, was back in her son's room, receiving the doctor's instructions as composedly as if nothing had occurred since she had left it.

By sunrise all was quiet in the house again. The doctor had departed, leaving word that he would come again in the course of the day, and see how his patient was getting on, and Mrs. Leaf was sitting by her son's bedside, his hand fast locked in hers, gazing down with anxious tenderness upon his bronzed, handsome face as he lay asleep. So proud of him she felt; for who, she thought, of all the young farmers in the country-side, could come near her Reuben. So busy in her thoughts too, for how satisfied she was that Jessie still held sway within his breast. How she had watched him the evening before, and exulted inwardly as she had seen his eyes again and again fastened on that pretty bright face, and noticed how silent he had been when he got back after seeing her home.

It would all turn out as she had hoped. She was sure it would. Miss Julia Stabler might lay her snares now in vain. Jessie was returned, and Reuben would get a wife, who, taking her all in all, might do as well for him as even Margery Bradshaw herself.

Poor Mrs. Leaf! If she could but have read

Jessie's thoughts just then; but of course she could not, and it was as unlikely that any one whom Reuben chose to love, should do anything but love him in return. It never so much as occurred to her to suppose that anything else could be the case.

Still Reuben slept, and still his mother watched, and before a sharp twinge of pain in the injured shoulder had awoke him, the news of his accident had spread all over Marton, and been told to Jessie by one of the lads from the mill, who was passing by just as she had come out of the cottage to fasten back the shutters, and gather a sprig of sweetbrier and a bit of mignonette, to put for a posy into her bosom.

"He's smashed hisself awful," said the boy; "putten his shoulder out, an' a lot beside. They brought him home right in t' middle o' t' night, lying on a board, an' Dr. Stinson he come an' did for him. He'd walk into him, would t' doctor. I know he did me yon time when I sprained my ankle. Wouldn't I ha' liked him just to ha' done t' same to hisself an' me to doctor him. Wouldn't I ha' walked into him, that's all. An' there's

Mrs. Clyde up at the Priory House. She's badly an' all. They say a trouble has allays a double. They've gotten a doctor from Bedesby for her. But I must be off; the missis telled me I war to look sharp back," and without waiting to answer the questions Jessie was beginning eagerly to ask, he darted off into the middle of the road, and swinging himself up at the back of a cart which was going down the village, proceeded on his way by that mode of progression, consisting apparently of an uncomfortable compromise between a ride and a run, which for some occult reason known only to themselves, seems to be so peculiarly adapted to the exigencies of errand-boy nature.

CHAPTER XII.

WORTH IT ALL.

REUBEN'S shoulder did not get well quite so easily as might have been desired. Inflammation had set in, and Mr. Stinson found the case not only as tedious, but considerably more serious than he had anticipated.

However, he went energetically to work. He pulled down the strength of his patient's manhood, and reduced him to pretty much the condition of a baby. He kept him in bed for more than a week, and put him to a good deal of pain every time he visited him. He directed Mrs. Leaf to feed him exclusively on gruel without wine, on sago, arrowroot, and such-like culinary slops, which Reuben, like all sick folks, perfectly detested. He

issued grave bulletins for several days, and expressly forbade his mother to allow any one to come in to see him. Then by degrees he began to relax in his severity, and finally one day let him out of prison, and gave him leave to come downstairs into the parlour.

Reuben had chafed sadly at this enforced seclusion. It was just the beginning of harvest, and he was sure things would all be going wrong at the farm with no one there to look after the men. There was a heavier crop, too, this year than usual; and the weather was so uncommonly awkward just now, never two fine days together. He knew the corn would be badly got in if Tim had everything his own way about it; and then there were so many more things than usual to take into consideration this season, for he was going off the farm soon and coming to the mill, and there would be things to arrange about that which no one but himself could do.

Besides all this burden, there was that secret uneasiness about Jessie Lee, and his vexation at the way he had let himself get entangled with that Julia Stabler, who he knew was always talking

about him, as if she were—which indeed was not far from the truth—on terms of the greatest intimacy with him.

He could not get it out of his mind. It fretted and fidgeted him night and day, as he tossed, restless with pain, upon his bed. No wonder he was impatient to be about again, that he might get back to his farm ; and that he might try, by his determined avoidance of the bailiff's daughter, to put a stop to the gossips' tales, and convince Jessie of his devotion to herself alone.

She had been down to the mill once to inquire after him, his mother said, and so had Marget. But though Marget had stayed some time, and inquired into all the particulars of the accident, Jessie had only called at the door, and gone away again immediately, without so much as coming in to sit down. She had never been again. Perhaps she had only come just out of civility, and did not care to know how he was getting on. Reuben stretched himself uneasily in his chair, wincing at a sudden twinge which his lame shoulder gave him as he made an unlucky movement. Then he stirred up the shaggy sheep-dog that lay sleep-

ing at his feet, and for want of better company began to divert himself with him.

All this time, Jessie, in her light summer dress, was coming along the Marton road, on her way to the mill, with a message from her aunt to Mrs. Leaf. It was hardly worth coming on purpose with; only about some strawberries for preserving, that Mrs. Leaf had been exchanging for some of the greengages which grew so plentifully in her uncle's garden, and were just ready now for gathering. But Marget had thought that it would only look neighbourly to send a regular message of inquiry after Reuben. For though they had heard of him every day through some one or other in the village, it was more than a week since she had been to the mill herself.

Jessie went readily enough. She would not have liked to have gone on her own account to Mrs. Leaf to inquire after her son, but with a message from her aunt it did not look as if she were particularly anxious herself about him; and yet, at heart, poor Jessie had been in sad distress. The news of Reuben's accident had demolished at a single blow all the little bulwarks

of pride which she had been erecting so busily against him. Her thoughts at once seized hold of the worst that could happen. He might die; and if he did, should she ever forgive herself for the way in which she had parted from him when he said "Good-bye" that Sunday night at her uncle's gate? She need not have been uncivil to him, even though he had not acted quite well, perhaps, by her. And now she might never have the chance of making it up again. He had looked hurt, too, she was sure, at the way she had behaved to him. Poor Reuben! And then they had heard that he was getting better, and the thought of Julia Stabler had come again across her mind, and she had tried afresh to steel herself against him.

It was nearly three this afternoon when she set off from home—a quiet, dull afternoon. There had been rain in the morning, and since it fell, neither sun nor wind had dried up the wet from the dripping thatch of the cottage roofs, or the mud from the stone causeway of the village street.

Jessie picked her way till she got out on to

the Haxby road. It was better there, and she walked more briskly forward along the haling road by the banks of the Lyme, watching the gray gleam of the river beneath the clouded sky, and the steady reflection in the water of the drooping willows that fringed its banks. Wondering, too, about Reuben, and feeling instead of her former pique against him, a dull sense of something aching at her heart, which was beginning already to take away the bloom and freshness of the life at home, which had promised when first she had returned, to be so sweet and pleasant.

There was no stir of life in the mill-yard when she went in. The men apparently were all busy inside the mill. The great watch-dog lay asleep outside his kennel. He gave a short, gruff bark as she clicked the latch of the gate, and then seeing who it was, laid down his nose again upon his paws. The mill-wheel was going though, and the stream thundering and splashing beneath it with a deafening roar that drowned all sounds besides its own.

She went across the yard to the kitchen door,

which was standing open as usual. She gave a gentle tap. No one came. She knocked again more loudly than before, and then Mrs. Leaf's voice from within called to her to enter.

"I thought it was you, Jessie, by your knock. It's as light as a lady's. I'm sorry I can't shake hands with you, for my fingers are all wet with the lemon juice."

Mrs. Leaf was busy squeezing lemons for jelly, which, as she told Jessie, she was just going to make for Reuben. She had her sugar and wine, her isinglass, lemon, and eggs, all ranged on the table before her, ready for use as soon as the water in the little brass skillet on the fire should be hot enough to commence operations.

"He's got downstairs this afternoon for the first time," she said, in answer to Jessie's inquiry. "Dr. Stinson says he'll get well right away now, but it's pulled him down sadly, it has. You'll see a deal o' difference on him, Jessie, to what he was that Sunday you was here. Poor lad! I didn't think when he rode away at night, as I should see him brought home the way he was. Step into the parlour an' speak to him. He'll be

glad to see you. He was asking, only yesterday, whether you'd been again."

Jessie did not respond, however, to Mrs. Leaf's invitation, but began to give her message about the fruit.

"They're ready for pulling, are the greengages. My aunt says they are all the better not to be over-ripe for preserving. She's going to do some of her's to-night. However, you can have them whenever you like, if you'll let her know when you want them."

Mrs. Leaf considered a moment. "Let me see, this is Monday. I think I could do with them on Thursday. It's a spare day and I could give my mind to them. Then I'll send our lad down on Wednesday. If you'd just be as kind, you or your aunt, to tie down the basket with a bit of string. He's a terrible lad for picking, is Ted. I never trust him, not if I can help it, with anything he can get to."

Jessie promised, and then got up to leave.

"I wont stop, Mrs. Leaf, this afternoon. I shall be hindering you with the jelly. I should be sorry to make you spoil it."

"Nay, you're not going yet, surely!" exclaimed Mrs. Leaf. "You haven't had time to rest, and such a walk as it is, too, from your house. Stop and have your tea. Do now. It'll be ready in good time, on account of Reuben."

"Oh, no," said Jessie; "I can't indeed, thank you. My aunt will be expecting me."

"Well, never mind, she can spare you for once. Come now, take off your things and stay. It'll be a charity, I'm sure, for we never see anyone down here. We're so out of the way."

But Jessie was not to be persuaded.

"I will stay another time," she said; "but I can't now. Besides, I'm not dressed for coming out to tea."

Mrs. Leaf thought, as she looked at her pretty smiling face and dainty print dress, with its tiny pattern running over the white ground, that Jessie was dressed enough for visiting, whatever she had on. However, she did not say what she thought, but returned to the attack at a different point.

"You'll step in to see Reuben before you go. He'll be glad of a bit of company. He gets sadly moped, being shut up so long with himself.

You'll find him there in the parlour, if you'll excuse my leaving the jelly just now. I shan't be long before I've got it out of hand."

Jessie could not very well refuse. It would not look well she thought to do so, as Mrs. Leaf begged her so to go in. Besides, in her heart, she really wanted to see Reuben again, just to see how he was, and whether he looked as if he had been so very ill.

She went out of the kitchen, therefore, and stepped softly across the passage to the parlour door. She felt a little timid as she pushed it open. If he should be very much altered by his illness. She was surprised, however, when she saw him. He was less changed than she had expected. Perhaps it was the flashing smile that lighted up his face as she stole gently into the room, and which smoothed out the lines that pain and weariness had drawn. He did not rise, but bent forward on his chair with a movement as if he would have held out his hand to greet her as she entered. But he did not do it; perhaps he thought of the last time he had parted from her.

Jessie noticed it, and a little touch of pain came across her as she did so.

"It is very kind of you to come in," he said. "I knew it was you talking to mother in the kitchen. I heard your voice."

"I wasn't coming in," said Jessie, sitting down on the chintz couch beside the window, "only Mrs. Leaf begged me to. She said you were dull for want of a bit of company."

It did not seem, however, as if Jessie were likely to do much towards supplying the want, for nothing else occurred to her to say, except that they had been very sorry to hear of his accident.

"It was unlucky," said Reuben, "coming just as it did, right in the beginning of harvesting. However, I hope I shall get off to Haxby again before the end of next week. There's a deal of our corn to get in yet, an' Tim hasn't much notion of things without me to his back. He's first rate for working, is Tim, if you put him to it, but he hasn't much of a headpiece of his own."

"It's been rain again to-day, you see," said

Jessie; "I saw a deal of corn in stook as I came along, all ready to lead, if only there would come two or three fine days together to let it get dried."

Jessie paused, and then as Reuben made no reply, she started on another track.

"You'll be glad to get settled at Marton again. You're fixed to come back to the mill, aren't you?"

"Yes," answered Reuben; "the Haxby farm's let. Five year I've had it come Lady Day; ever since you went away."

"I remember," said Jessie. "It doesn't seem so long since, though. It's only like yesterday, to look back at it."

Jessie was thinking of that last night before she went to London. She did not say so though, but turned to look out of the window at the beds of geraniums and heliotropes in the garden in front of the house. They gave her something quite safe to talk about. Every moment she kept hoping that Mrs. Leaf herself would have finished her jelly and would come into the room. But she waited in vain. Whether the jelly was

done or not, no Mrs. Leaf appeared to make a third in the conversation which was gradually getting more and more difficult to keep up. At last Jessie rose from her seat to go. She was vexed with herself. She had never felt so stupid and uninteresting before. She would really have liked, this afternoon, to have talked on pleasantly about something or other that should have amused Reuben. She had wanted to cheer him up a little and make him feel the better for her visit; but she felt instead, as if she had only tired him with talk that it had been no pleasure to him to listen to.

"I must go now," she said. "Mrs. Leaf is busy yet, I daresay. Will you say good-bye to her for me, if I don't see her in the kitchen?"

She went towards Reuben as she spoke, and held out her hand to him. He should see, she thought, that she did not mean now to be stiff, though she had seemed so the other night.

He reached out eagerly to take it in his own, but bit his lips with pain as he moved forward, and leaned back again for an instant in his chair.

He had given a terrible jerk to the injured joint by his hasty movement.

"Your shoulder hurts you," cried Jessie, as she stood before him, her face full of sympathy and concern. "I am so sorry I disturbed you."

"Oh, it is nothing," said Reuben. "It is over now; only I keep forgetting that there is anything the matter with it, and then it lets me know. You see I'm not used to be laid up like this. Good-bye, Jessie, it's been very kind of you to come."

He let go her hand as he spoke, and leaned back again in the great elbow chair.

"Let me pull up these cushions," said Jessie. "They've all slipped down. They're worse than nothing, so."

"Mother put them there," he said. "She would make me have them, or else they're only in the way. Don't trouble yourself about them," he added, as Jessie adjusted them aright; "I'd as lief be without them."

"Nay," said Jessie, "not when they're fixed right. "That's better, isn't it?"

But Reuben did not answer. He had caught one of the little hands that was busy about him, and was holding it in a clasp that told more than he had ever dared to put in words.

He kept it a long time, and Jessie let it stay. She could not, if she would, have drawn it from him. Her pride, her pique, her shy constraint, had fallen from her. She knew only that Reuben loved her, that he was telling it to her in that long, close clasp of his.

At last, he looked up at her face. Their eyes met; and then the words came out—

"Oh, Jessie! if you could frame to love me, I'd never let you know a want no more."

Jessie did not speak. She was trembling beside him like a shadow on a stream. But when he let go her hand, and stole his arm around her waist, and drew her down closer, closer to himself, till he felt her warm breath upon his face, she did not draw herself away. And when—it might be an hour, it might be five minutes after—a step was heard at the door, and Mrs. Leaf came in, and Reuben looked up and said—

"Mother, Jessie has promised to be my wife"—

Jessie did not say him nay, so we may suppose that somehow they had settled the matter between them; and let us hope that the sympathizing reader rejoices at the result of their silent conference.

CHAPTER XIII.

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS.

IT was about half-past four in the afternoon, on one of those drowsy days that come at the beginning of autumn. The sunlight was creeping lazily, with a warm mellow glow, through the diamond lattice of the window. It just touched with threads of gold Alison's soft hair, as she sat in a low chair by Janet's bedside, bending over a piece of delicate embroidery.

Not a sound was to be heard in the room as her fingers flew swiftly over her work. Only through the half-open casement came the twittering of the birds in the vine-branches round the window, and the sound of Michael's rake as he smoothed the gravel on the broad walk in front of the house.

It was the stillness of a sick-room, a room in which for a time, the great Shadow had been sitting, and from which he had but just departed.

In the midst of it, Janet opened her eyes, as if waking softly from a long undreaming sleep. They fell upon Alison's bending head, on the fair, pure outlines of her gentle face, turned a little aside now as she stooped over the work she held in her hands.

Janet's lips parted to pronounce her name, but they parted only. She had no power to speak the word aloud. Something seemed strange around her. Why was Alison sitting there with those rays of sunshine trembling around her? How came she to be lying there herself, awake, in the daytime?

For a moment she tried to gather her thoughts together, but her strength failed her. She just subsided again into a sort of conscious slumber; her eyes open, still resting on Alison's bright head, but every thought, every feeling, folded into a sense of infinite repose.

Then, as in a dream, she saw Alison arise. She laid down her work on the little stand beside

her, and went noiselessly to a table across the room, where were some labelled phials, some glasses, and one of the tall cut decanters that belonged to the sideboard in the dining-room.

Janet followed her movements with her eye; that seemed indeed to be the only part of her that was awake and able to perform her bidding. She watched her pour out some wine into a glass, and bring it silently to her bedside. Then she felt her head raised, and Alison's arm supporting her as she put the glass to her lips. She drank the wine, feeling weak and dizzy all the time from the change in her position. When she had finished it, Alison laid her head again gently on the pillow, and stood silently beside her, watching the pale, still face.

"Alison," said Janet, after a moment's rest, in a tone so low and faint that none but the ear of listening love could have gathered up the accents, so feeble were they, more like a sigh than a spoken word.

Alison bent down over her eagerly, tenderly. It was Janet's own voice again, not the vague muttering of delirium in which she had betrayed

the secret so carefully concealed before. The look that was resting upon her face had lost the vacant gaze which till now it had distressed her so to meet. The weary, anxious waiting was ended at last. This quiet sleep, from which Janet had just awoke, had been as the renewal of her life.

"My darling," she whispered, "you are come back to us then again."

"Where have I been, Alison? What does it all mean?"

"You have been ill, Janet dear, many days. But do not talk now. Lie still and rest again. By-and-bye I will tell you all."

She leaned down over Janet, half-kneeling by the side of the bed, and took her hand in both her own, folding it in a soft, close clasp that soothed her into silence.

Janet was too weak to resist the influence of her gentle nurse. She closed her eyes and lay quïet again, as in a bright, soft dream, conscious of nothing but that sense of exceeding rest by which she was surrounded. The tide of life seemed slowly swaying to and fro, bearing her on its scarcely-heaving waves across the boundary of

time into the dim region that lies beyond. Then, with a lingering, gliding motion, back into the world of consciousness again. She felt no pain, no weariness, only the feeling of an infinite calm, as though her whole being was dissolved in a mist of mellow light.

Presently her eyelids drooped more closely over her eyes, her breath came more slowly—she was asleep again—her hand still held in that of Alison, who sat beside her, gazing on the sleeping face with a look of tender love, that seemed as if it would arrest the very soul in its uncertain lingering, and compel it to remain.

The sunlight crept round. The shadows of the tall beech hedge fell further and further across the lawn, putting out the trembling light which was dancing among the long spires of grass as they shimmered in the golden beams. The rooks came cawing home to their nests in the old elm trees. The sound of the labourers' voices behind the hedge, as they went past the garden on their way home from harvesting, had ceased. The birds twittered no longer in the vines upon the wall, and the crisping leaves in the tree tops

began to rustle softly in the rising breeze. The shadows gathered in the corners of the great wardrobe, and under the heavy canopy of the bed. The crimson gleam from the setting sun faded off the floor, and mounted slowly up until it stained with its ruby light the tarnished gilding of an oval frame, wherein was the portrait of a long-forgotten ancestress of Janet's, with cracked and faded face, and costume of the time of Charles the First. Then it lost itself among the intricacies of the deep mouldings of the cornice, and still Janet slept, still Alison sat beside her, listening to the quiet, even breathing, her hand fast clasped in hers, her patient love feeling no fatigue as hour after hour went slowly by.

The casement was open still; Alison would not rise to close it, lest she should disturb the slumber that was bringing life and refreshment with it. Besides, the air was too mild as yet to need shutting out, even from the sick-room. Presently she heard, borne very faintly on the breeze across the Marton woods, the sound of the curfew-bell from the towers of Marton church. Sometimes she caught it quite distinctly as it rose upon the

wind. Then it faded quite away, and then again rang gently forth.

It seemed to her, as she listened, like a voice from the past, speaking to her across the centuries, telling of the quiet eventide, of rest from the toil of the day—telling, too, of that deeper rest that comes when the long day of life is past, and its griefs and joys are all alike forgotten.

While it was still chiming out, Janet awoke. Her sleep had revived her strength. Thought, too, began to stir. In an instant it flew back to that last-remembered evening, and brought to her again the memory of her grief.

Alison saw the sudden look of pain that passed across her face.

"What is it, Janet?" she said, as she met the wild, sad eyes that sought her own.

"Oh, Alison," answered Janet, "you do not know. It was more than I could bear; and my life was so glad before."

"Hush, darling, hush; I know it all," and Alison laid a kiss on her white, quivering lips, folded her head on her bosom, and then, in the silence that fell between them, in the close pres-

sure of the circling arms, in that noiseless sympathy, deeper far and truer than any that words could give, Janet felt how precious was the love that still remained to cheer her darkened lot, although the sunlight had all died now from out her life. Like a tired child, she leaned down her weariness on the heart of her friend, saying, as she did so, these words only, "Surely I have come into deep waters, so that the floods run over me."

CHAPTER XIV.

WHICH THE LIGHT READER WILL PROBABLY SKIP.

LEONARD, as we have said, was a man who never faltered in a purpose. He might fail in it—he did sometimes; but it was not without a strenuous effort to achieve his will.

And so now, seeing where the right lay, he carried at once into effect his resolution to tear himself away from a spot whose very dearness proved its danger. He remained at Marton until he heard that Janet was recovering. Then he left the Hall and went abroad. It was best to do so. Already he had felt the weakness of his strength, and confessed now to himself that his longer stay

could be no solace, but an added source of pain. For Janet's sake, too, he would go. Ever since that terrible night which had parted them so far asunder, the most bitter drop in his own cup had been the thought that all he suffered for her, was also suffered by her for him. And yet he asked himself sometimes—Could it be that their grief was equal? Was her woman's nature capable of holding the infinite measure of love that filled his own? It seemed to Leonard then that not even her love could be like his. His whole being had been expanded by it, every faculty intensified. It had filled his life as sunlight fills the blue vault of heaven. And how great was the darkness that for a season fell upon him now, none but himself could tell.

But it cleared away. He looked around. The world was empty, yet it lay there before him. And seeing that henceforth he must go through it alone, he girt himself up to carry his load as best he might.

There was the making of a noble man in Leonard Holdych, though till lately many of his

finest faculties had lain disjointed and unused. He had lacked the motive power which should impel him to strain every nerve in the strife for perfectness; but since his residence at Marton, with all the new influences that were stirring there within him and around him, his life had been shaping out itself into forms of new dignity and beauty. It had been consolidating, purifying, rising into harmony and order. Still, as yet, its soundness had remained untried. It might ring true when struck, but no blow had ever hitherto fallen heavily upon it. Now the testing time had come, which should prove the worth or weakness of the metal.

Through some such period of probation all of us must pass. There is no shirking it. Come it will, unless we are to be cast out as useless lumber among the rubbish of humanity. With some the process is short, sharp, sudden; a hot branding-iron, pressed hissing into the quivering flesh, a swift shock of agony—but the man has stood the test. He bears upon him now the mark of the Great Artificer—warranted sterling gold, free from all mixture of base alloy.

And with others this test is lighter, scarcely felt perhaps. It is but slight work to which the Master means to put them. No need for sharp trial here.

We have seen how Leonard reeled and shook beneath the blow which had been struck so surely where it would be most keenly felt. But the truth within was mightier than the force without. He staggered, but he did not fall. And after the probation came the preparation. Hitherto he had worked well, but it had been mostly for himself. Only recently had he begun to take a larger standing-ground than his own solitary personality. Now a place was waiting for him in the ranks of the little band of labourers, who, with hand and heart all steadily at work, go forth to gather in the harvest already whitening on the world's broad field.

And this preparation lasted long. The soldier is not drilled in a day. The man who would teach others how to live, must take long counsel with his own heart first. There was much in Leonard to be done before he could join worthily that noble band. Much also to be undone; and

this was the hardest task of all. A child may drop the acorn. It takes a strong arm to fell the oak.

Looking back three hundred years or more, we see wrought out in history a symbol of the task which, during those long months of voluntary exile from his home, Leonard was striving to accomplish, painfully, earnestly; stumbling and rising again, often in the dark, with no hand to guide him, no voice to cheer him on. A task which is given to each one of us, if faithful to God, to man, and to ourselves, with more or less difficulty to accomplish. And in Columbus and his mutinous, complaining crew, sailing out towards the western world, we have a type of man with his unruly passions, pleasure, selfishness, and pride, navigating the stormy sea of life. We seek an undiscovered land, rich and beautiful beyond compare, still we only know it by report. The winds and waves, the chances and changes and trials of the world, combine, apparently, against us. Often the spirit well-nigh fails. The distant shore may never be attained. Nay, at times, the doubt arises, has it even an existence? The

fleshly crew war wildly against the sorely-tempted spirit. But patience! courage! We steer by the stars. They are lost in the darkness of the storm. Still the compass—the true heart turning to its God—directs our course aright. Faint, perplexed, yet not despairing, we struggle desperately on; over dark water-floods, tossed onward by the billows, our sails rent, our masts shattered, our rebellious crew reduced at last, if not to loyalty, yet to obedience. Until, far on the dim horizon, like a faint line of golden light, appears the longed-for shore, which, after this hard voyaging, we have attained at length.

Leonard reached it. Instead of the waves of human passion swelling tumultuously around him, he stood now on solid ground. Firm as on a granite rock his feet were planted on the Infinite. Truths that before he had perceived, clearly indeed, but with the outward eye alone, were wrought now into the very structure of his being. Life, as he thought upon it, grew beautiful and awful. It was a terrible gift, not to be expended in the pursuit of pleasure, or failing that, to be moodily despised, but to be rendered

back to the Giver in true and honourable service, and in the full and perfect exercise of every faculty with which he had been endowed.

The waiting was over, the preparation was complete. And then the circumstances of life, which in truth are but the calls of the Almighty, summoned him to go forth and work.

Janet, too, strove resolutely with her grief. At last she beat it down and came out again into the little world of home, then into that of the Marton people, quieter than of old, as all could tell, and with lines of patient sadness about the folded lips, which those who loved her sighed to see. But otherwise she was much the same. Only that there was an added tenderness in all her ways, which showed that sorrow had still further softened the heart that was never anything but kind; and had given her a deeper insight, and a fuller sympathy with the wants of others. The past few weeks, with all that they had brought, their moments of quivering joy and anguish deep as death, seemed to her like a long and vivid dream into which she had fallen and was now again awake. For indeed it was strange,

even to herself, how little bitterness, after the first shock had passed, there was in this sudden emptying of her life, which had left her desolate indeed at heart, yet richer even now than if she had never lifted the cup of happiness to her lips. She would not if she could, have gone back to that old content which she had known before. If hope had been thus rudely snatched away, the memory of what once had been, was a possession still, of which nothing could deprive her. A possession marred by no remorse, no regret, no wounded pride or crippled faith.

And she could joy and glory still in the love whose purity knew no stain, even in its strength. For a woman's love is a little nearer the angels' than that of man; and the flame that scorches him, may be in her heart but as the live coal from off the altar, that touched the prophet's lips.

Yet there were times when her spirit sank within her. It was hard to bear up always, to keep an unruffled countenance when the thought of what might have been

rushed through her like a resistless flood. It was hard sometimes to tread patiently the cold, grey road, that stretched before her now. Janet had a woman's fortitude and truth, but she had a woman's weakness too; and though it was but for a moment, as it were, that she had leaned on that strong arm, yet now that it was suddenly withdrawn, she could but totter forward. It was not for her any longer to go bravely on, unaided and alone.

Yet not alone. Leonard had said truly, they could never quite be parted. She had not once heard of him, knew nothing of his wanderings. He had cut unflinchingly each cord of outward union that hitherto had bound them. Yet sundered as they were in bodily presence, there were moments in her life, in which she felt that soul to soul they touched. There are strange mysteries hidden in this life of ours, mysteries which language may not reach, too subtle for sense to penetrate, nay, of whose very existence but few are conscious. Yet there they are, sleeping within us, dim foreshadowings of the time when

this clay prison-house shall be burst open, the inexorable barriers broken down, and when the freed spirit shall leap forth exulting, to mingle with that universal life of which here its own is but an isolated atom.

And so days and weeks crept on, and the year that had brought to Janet this priceless gift of love, and almost before her hands had closed around it, had snatched it from her grasp, wore slowly to an end, and another new year dawned. A solemn time to every one who looks seriously along its yet untrodden path. It was always so to Janet, as she thought upon the coming months lying folded one beneath the other, and wondered what, by-and-bye, he should see written on their unturned leaves, as one by one they were opened out before her. For it is a strange feeling this of knowing that time will assuredly go on and carry us, our lives and interests, along with it; that, link by link, our line of being will be steadily paid out, though what those links may be we cannot tell. And yet, unknown to us although it be, in the mind of God our future life is existing

even now. If no effort of ours can tear aside the veil, yet behind it lies what will one day be our own, a possession for all time to come. For all experience, whether of suffering or delight, is truly a possession of which nothing can deprive us.

But this year, as Janet looked down through its shadowed course, there seemed little to ask, little to hope for from it. For her, all life lay in the past, and in the future, as it seemed now, there could be peace only, but no longer any thought of joy.

And so, having little in this world to look forward to, she was learning the lesson which the sense of human incompleteness is always meant to teach, of sending her thoughts onwards to that far-off land where there shall be no hope left unfulfilled, no want unsatisfied. With her, as with Leonard, looking out over the great expanse of the future, she saw only one vast fluctuating level of heaving waves. Away, away, beyond the utmost reach of thought, of sight, it stretched before her. Yet, tossed as now she was, these billows of time

broke, she knew full well, upon a shore where there would be rest at last. Rest at last, though there must be toil and long waiting between.

And to this distant bourne her thoughts went often now. There was little on the way for them to stay and linger by. And returning, they came laden always with strength and patience—patience to bear quietly the cross of life, strength to carry it, unbowed beneath its weight, along her darkened path. She was learning, too, more perfectly, that other lesson, so hard to be received, harder still to practise, of looking with a wise and loving eye on the little portion of time which the passing day brings with it, seeking diligently to win from it all that it was meant to give, and giving careful heed to make it all that it was meant to be. This is the great secret of a true and noble life; one which eyes dimmed by tears read often more clearly than others can, and which no suffering may be reckoned wasted that reveals it to us. Little by little Janet was discovering it, telling it out day by day in sweet musical deeds of thoughtful charity and tender loving-kindness; feeling in her loneli-

ness God's hand closing only the more firmly around her own, and waiting in patient trust for the time when, to all true seekers and workers, comes the beginning of perfection; when all within harmonizes with all without, and no jarring string of human grief or frailty makes dissonance in the full song of joy that rises from the soul.

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH THE LIVING OF MARTON FALLS VACANT.

IN those days it fell out that the Bishop of Bedesby died; an old man and full of years; full of emoluments also, on the reversion of which to themselves a hundred eager aspirants after preferment began forthwith eagerly to speculate.

To the Church triumphant, possibly, the exit of a bishop from the stage of life may be invested with no greater importance than the departure of some coalheaver or seamstress from the scene of their sublunary toil. But by the Church militant the event is regarded with feelings of profoundest interest. For seeing that the departed dignitary has been able to carry nothing with him of all that he possessed on earth, but must

perforce leave everything behind, place, power, patronage, riches, pomp and dignity, for others to take up, how keen must be the excitement of the scramble which ensues!

Who would get the vacant bishopric?—became for a season the one great question of the day. It was buzzed and hummed throughout the length and breadth of the world ecclesiastical. It penetrated, and with authority, too, into the seclusion of the Canon's library at Marton Rectory.

Would he accept the honour that was waiting to be conferred upon him?

The Canon was not prepared for this. He knew his place in the world. He knew—what worthy man does not?—his own worth in it too. For true humility, that lovely grace, the child of self-knowledge and the parent of charity, consists, not in thinking lowly, but lowlily, of oneself, and this may well consort with a right estimate of all that a man has won to himself by the faithful exercise of those God-given faculties which too many leave to rust, or use but to pervert.

But the Canon, though he was not unaware of what men in high places had long been whispering about him, was unprepared for the proposal when it actually was made.

It took him by surprise. It did not find him disposed at once to leap up and embrace the proffered dignity. There were many things to be considered on both sides of the question. He held close consultation with himself. He debated long and seriously upon the matter. He took counsel with Alison also, about it. For Alison's wishes ruled the Canon's will, and not for the bishopric of Bedesby itself, would he have rooted out his tender plant from her Marton home against her inclination.

But though Alison loved Marton well, she was yet prouder of her father. She knew how nobly he would fill the bishop's throne, how wisely he would rule the diocese, and, womanlike, she exulted more in his exaltation than she lamented over even the tearing asunder of the ties that bound her to her childhood's home.

By slow degrees the balance turned. The

rector grieved to leave the people whom he had shepherded for thirty years. He was a faithful pastor, bound by many close and tender ties to the people of his charge. But he also was a man, with a man's hopes and aims and aspirations. There was within him the consciousness of strength, of rectitude, of true beneficence of purpose. He longed with the longing of all men of intense and noble natures to stamp his impress on the world; and this he knew he could more effectually do as Bishop of Bedesby, with the episcopal crozier in his hand, than as the simple Rector of Marton, with no authority beyond the narrow limits of his country parish.

And so it came to pass, that not many weeks after the old Bishop of Bedesby had been gathered to his fathers, Canon Birney, the Rector of Marton, was installed in the vacant place.

When a new bishop is appointed to take the pastoral oversight of a diocesan flock, there are numerous preliminaries to be observed, with which, doubtless, the reader is too well acquainted to need their recapitulation here. But as all know, the crowning point, the culmination of the

whole affair, the time when the state and dignity of thhe new ecclesiastic shines out most brightly in the eyes of an assembled diocese, is that when the ceremony of enthronization is performed in the cathedral belonging to the See.

On the day that Bishop Birney was enthroned, half Marton went forth to obtain, if possible, a sight of him in his robes of office. Old and young, high and low, rich and poor, churchgoers and methodists, trudged out the seven miles on foot, jogged over it in spring-carts, gigs, and waggons, and drove along in well-appointed carriages or stylish "traps" to pay their tribute of rejoicing homage to the memory of their recent rector, and the praise of the new-made bishop.

Among the rest went Janet and her father, with Michael, in the old pony-carriage. Mr. Brande was not going to see the ceremony. He had no taste for seeing sights of any kind, but the journey came conveniently for him. He was going up to London on the same day, and so took the opportunity of bringing Janet to Bedesby with him on his way to the station.

She was not going, however, to return that

day, having arranged to spend the period of her father's absence at Bedesby with her aunt.

Miss Mildred had been ailing for the last year or so. Like many people who have lived active and stirring lives, her strength, when it began to fail, failed all at once. And now sometimes for weeks together she was confined almost entirely to the house. Janet had begged her, once or twice, to return and make her home with them once more at the Priory House, but this Miss Mildred seemed averse to do. Having had a house of her own so long, she was unwilling now to relinquish it, though the tedium of her solitude often weighed heavily upon her, unable as she was to beguile it by her former occupations.

Janet did what lay in her power to solace her aunt's declining days. She went over to Bedesby as often as circumstances permitted, driving there with her father or old Michael in the morning, and returning in the evening. She had promised Miss Mildred, however, for some time, to go after Christmas and stay a fortnight with her, while her father was away. He had wished her at first to accompany him to London, but

Janet was in no mood for this just now. She was still too utterly crushed in heart and life to feel equal to the bustle of a fortnight's visit to the metropolis. To be quiet; to be able to do some silent work that should not too greatly tax her wasted spirit, was all she craved; and though she saw that her father was really wishful to have her for his companion, she shrank with an almost morbid dread from the prospect of the excitement of London life.

She should prefer, she said, spending the fortnight with her aunt; and Mr. Brande, seeing her evident wish to remain behind, forbore to urge her further.

Not that Janet afflicted her friends by writing on her face a perpetual epitaph on her buried hopes. She covered them up, decently and fitly, with an unlifted mantle of reserve and silence, even as Nature, in her wise way, wraps her green sod over the churchyard mounds. She might go to the grave, sometimes to weep there, but if she did, no traces of her tears were ever seen. Only at rare moments she would for an instant lean down on Alison the burden of her grief. But generally her countenance

was peaceful, if not bright, and her interest given, just as it had been of old, to the concerns of those about her.

They had an early breakfast, and by ten o'clock were on their way. That would just give them time to call for a moment on Miss Mildred, before Janet went on to meet Alison at the hotel where she and her father were staying.

The ceremony was to begin at twelve o'clock, but for an hour before, the cathedral bells were chiming bravely out. Janet and Alison sat listening to them as they waited for the arrival of the carriage of the archdeacon's lady, who was to act as their escort on the occasion.

For once Alison seemed excited. The colour came and went upon her gentle face, her eyes grew bright and large, her lips could hardly restrain themselves from a quivering smile. She paced restlessly up and down the room.

"Oh Janet!" she said, "I am almost afraid of myself. It seems so strange to think of this great change that has come upon us. Now that I am really feeling what it is to have papa the

Bishop of Bedesby, I could almost wish we had never had to leave the old Rectory-house at Marton. It is like leaving a quiet haven and sailing out upon a stormy sea."

She came and sat by Janet on the couch, and leaned down her head upon her shoulder, then started nervously up.

"There is the carriage!" she exclaimed, "I heard it stop."

Janet rose and looked out of the window.

"So it is. There is Mrs. Drury in it. She sees us—she is looking up. Shall we go down?"

Alison was herself again now, quiet and composed. She gathered up her gloves and followed Janet down to the carriage.

The archdeacon's lady was a pleasant, lively little woman, full of chatter and enjoyment. Janet knew her slightly, having seen her once at a party at the Rectory. But Mrs. Drury was one of those demonstrative, somewhat volatile little creatures who never know any one slightly. She greeted Janet as though she had been an old acquaintance, and would insist, notwithstanding all her protestations, on resigning her own seat in favour of herself and Alison.

"Not a word, not a word, my dear; I should feel quite out of place, indeed, to see you sitting down here with your back to the horses. You must learn not to be afraid of your dignity. You must, indeed," she said, as she laid playful hands on the bishop's daughter. "Drive on now, Markham, to the small door against the chapter-house. We shall get in quietly there," she explained, turning to Alison. "I expect the place will be immensely crowded; and, now, where would you like to be? Of course you can sit in the stalls, if you wish. We shall have our places reserved there for us. But it occurred to me, or rather the archdeacon suggested it, decidedly the best place, if you wish to see the whole of the ceremony, which naturally you will, would be in the organ gallery. It is true, you would not be seen there yourself, and you know," she added, laughing, "being the daughter of the bishop, perhaps——"

"Oh, Mrs. Drury," interrupted Alison, "that will not concern me in the least. I shall feel most thankful to remain unseen. But I should like certainly to see as much as possible of what is going on."

"Well, then, my dear, we will consider it as settled, and go to the organ gallery. Dr. Canley knows he may possibly expect us, so no doubt he will have given instructions to have chairs taken up, and the place well dusted out for our accommodation. You see, Mrs. Clyde, being just over the gates of the choir, we shall have the prospect, not only of the service there, but also of the procession down the whole length of the nave;" and Mrs. Drury leaned forward and bowed to some ladies, whose carriage had just got locked in with her own, obliging them for a minute to proceed at a walking pace.

There were traces of evident excitement as they drove through the streets of the quiet little town. Carriages rolling along in the same direction as their own, knots of well-dressed people hurrying forward with coloured tickets in their hands, intent on arriving at the cathedral in time to obtain good places for seeing the ceremony, and sprinkled thickly amongst the moving throng was a goodly number of the rectors, vicars, and curates of the towns and villages in the diocese, all wending their way toward the great centre of attraction, in order to be in readiness to take their places in the pro-

cession that was to meet and receive the new ecclesiastic.

As they neared the minster, the throng became more dense. Three vast crowds were gathered round the three chief entrances, waiting until the chiming of the half-hour bell should give the signal for admission.

It rang out just as the carriage of the archdeacon's lady passed through the iron gates leading within the Close, and instantly a tumultuous peal broke forth from the tall belfry tower—a musical, exultant clamour, that drowned at once the hum and murmur of the multitude, and silenced the rattle of the carriages that were rolling swiftly up. Mrs. Drury's drove on a little farther than the rest, round to the north end of the cathedral, and stopped at a small heavy door half-hidden in an angle near the chapter-house. It was a sort of private entrance for the church dignitaries and their families, by which they could go in secluded state through the cloisters to their places in the stalls. The footman got down and held it open while the ladies passed through. Mrs. Drury led the way across the aisle to a small door close by

the great gates of the choir, leading up into the gallery above the organ screen. The stairway was narrow and dark, and the rich dresses of the ladies swept and rustled against the black oaken panelling as they mounted the steps. Dr. Canley was there, awaiting their arrival. He led them forward to a space at one side of the organ, a little enclosure something like the ladies' gallery at the Houses of Parliament, where they could look on both sides through the pierced stonework of the organ screen, down the whole length of the nave on the one hand, and into the choir on the other.

He stood for a moment talking to Alison and the archdeacon's lady, then placing for them the seats which had been brought up for their accommodation, he bowed himself away to his own little special red-curtained sanctum, to look over once more the music which he was about to perform.

He had hardly gone when the door leading from the Chapter House was thrown open, and a procession of clergy in full canonicals issued forth. They paced very slowly on, two abreast, in one

continuous stream towards the great west door opposite to the organ screen, till the whole length of the nave was filled with their white robes. Then they fell apart, forming an aisle quite down to the gates of the choir. Along this aisle all the choristers, men and boys, in their white surplices, followed by the clergy and dignitaries belonging to the minster, came, to the music of a grand overture from the organ.

Alison leaned over the stone balustrade, her hand fast held in Janet's, her face a little pale, her lips trembling with agitation, watching with breathless interest the stately solemn progress of the white-robed multitude.

Suddenly the great west doors were thrown open. The bells which for a time had ceased, rang out again a peal of jubilant loud acclaim. And then beneath the lofty archway the new-made bishop entered the cathedral.

The dean went forward to receive him. The clergy raised their college caps aloft. Then suddenly the bells ceased their clangour, and in the silence that ensued the procession formed again, and filed back slowly towards the choir,

the choristers chanting softly as they went the hundred and twenty-first psalm.

The bishop walked last of all in solitary state. He bore himself with that grave unconscious sort of majesty which sits by nature on those crowned heads of humanity who have upon their brows the signet of sovereignty impressed, the sign manual of the Creator, setting them apart as by a special act of consecration to the great work of government, of ruling and directing by conscious or unconscious influence the hearts and lives of their fellow-men.

As he approached the gates of the choir beneath the organ screen, he raised his head and for a moment met his daughter's eyes full of trembling pride and love. The homage of the assembled crowd had left him, as waves fall back from a sea-girt rock, unmoved and calm; but that look of Alison's reached down beneath the vestments of the bishop and touched the father's heart. It was dearer than all the outward incense offered by the thousands who were thronging round him,—though even that was not without a value of its own, for it was not the

senseless adulation paid to the shadow of a name, but the glad free reverence of men rejoicing to see placed over them one to whose authority they could willingly submit.

All this time the sun was shining full in through the clerestory windows, casting shafts of dazzling light upon the clustered columns, and falling upon the long regular lines of snowy vestments all down the nave; now and then as the procession swayed slowly to and fro, glancing on the different coloured hoods, crimson, purple, blue, scarlet, violet, and black, with a strange dream-like effect, blending too, as in a subtle æsthetic harmony, with the clear soft voices of the singing boys, and the deeper tones of the organ music that trembled over all.

The bishop passed under the great archway, along the choir, to the seat appointed for him. The dean and canons fell into their respective stalls. The clergy, a moving mass of flowing surplices, subsided by degrees into their places, the choristers filed into theirs. Triumphant psalms were chanted forth, the Jubilate, the Venite, the loud Te Deum, mingled with solemn words of prayer. The Queen's mandate was read

out. Slowly, conducted by the dean, the bishop ascended the steps of the episcopal throne. There was a great silence for a space. Then over the bowed heads of the assembled multitudes he pronounced the benediction, and so, even in this, his first official act, he struck the keynote of his life.

When it was all over, Janet parted at the Chapter House door with Alison, who was going with the archdeacon's lady to the Residence, where she and her father were to lunch with a large cathedral party. It was a glorious winter day. The air clear and keen as crystal, the leafless branches of the trees in the Close, traced out sharply against the sky, the sun shining down brightly, if not warmly, upon the groups of people who were dispersing to their several homes. And over all came the clash and clang of the cathedral bells, a thundering avalanche of sound, startling the quiet precincts with their clamorous proclamation that the new bishop had begun his reign, and infecting even Janet with an unwonted exhilaration as she walked rapidly across the Close to the old-fashioned house just opposite the minster gates, in which her aunt resided.

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. DOUGHTY'S LODGER.

"ARE you going out again to-day, Janet?" said Miss Mildred, as she was composing herself after their early dinner, for the afternoon nap which had now become almost necessary to her.

"I had been thinking of it," answered Janet. "I have one or two things I want to get in the town. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"If you would not mind the trouble, I wish you would take this dispensary note to a person who came to ask me for one this morning. I told her I had not one, and, indeed, I thought I had given them all away. However, when I came to hunt about after she had gone, I found

just this one left. I can send Sarah with it, only if you are going out you might as well take it yourself. She is so long over an errand. It is only just down here that the woman lives."

"Oh, I will take it," said Janet, folding her work together and laying it by in her little case. "Where shall I find her?"

"She lives in Friar's-lane, that narrow street that turns down just at the bottom of Marygate. You will know the house when you see it. It is a muffin shop, about half-way down on the right-hand side of the street, and the name is over the door, 'Doughty.' She is a very decent woman. We always get our muffins of her. It was for a person though, who is lodging with her that she wanted the note. Consumption, I fancy, from what she said. However, I did not talk much to her, for it was too cold to be standing long at the door. That is the note, lying on the chimney-piece. You will manage to find the place."

"Oh, yes," said Janet, "I know the street." And she took the ticket and set out on her walk She did her shopping first. Then as she came home she looked out for the street her aunt had

named. She came to it at last; a long narrow lane writhing back into the heart of the city, with high overhanging houses on either side, the uppermost stories projecting so far beyond the rest, that the occupants of the garrets in the pointed gables might almost have shaken hands with one another out of the windows. It did not look particularly promising as Janet turned down into it. Ragged, ill-kept children were swarming about in every direction, while their squalid-looking mothers, with dirty, pale-faced babies in their arms, stood in the doorways, or sat, cold as it was, upon the steps, idly gossiping together, and breaking off every now and then to administer a sharp word or a slap on the arm to the children playing and quarrelling at their feet.

Janet steered her way cautiously along until she reached the muffin shop. It was a tidier-looking house than most of the others, with a clean sanded doorstep and little square window, in which stood a board filled with round patches of muffin dough, just ready for putting in the oven. She opened the door, ringing thereby a tinkling bell, which brought out the muffin-maker

from a little kitchen behind, whence she emerged with very floury hands, rubbing them clean as she came with her long white apron.

Janet gave her the note which her aunt had sent, and made a few inquiries about the sick woman.

"I'm afraid she's very bad, ma'am," said Mrs. Doughty, curtseying as she took the note. "She coughs sometimes fit to tear her inside out, an' she lies tewing about allays of a night, while very near morning, afore she gets a bit o' sleep. I believe myself she's uneasy partly in her mind. You see, ma'am, she's on her way north'ards. She were only to stop here a night, but however, she was took bad an' couldn't get no farther, an' she's just gone on wussening ever since."

"And how long has she been here?" asked Janet.

"She come here yesterday was a week, ma'am. She was on her way from London. She did tell me the name of the place as she were agoing to, but I've forgot it. I've a bad memory for them like things. I've been on at her about having a doctor afore now, but she's kept thinking

she'd be a bit better, and wouldn't have nothing to say to it. You see she was frightened, I daresay, o' not being able to pay him. I've been all over this morning, trying to get a dispensary note for her, an' couldn't. Being so near the end o' the year people's given them all away. Mebby you'd just step up an' see her, ma'am. I don't think she's a common person exactly, by her tongue. She's more like one that's comed down in the world, poor thing!"

Janet hesitated a moment. She was not very fond of visiting people she did not know.

"Perhaps," said she, "she would hardly like to see a stranger." And then a sudden pity for the poor friendless creature, overcoming her reluctance, she added, "if you think she would not mind, I would go up and take her the note."

"I should be glad if you would, ma'am, I'm sure," said Mrs. Doughty. "I'm pretty nigh beat to know what to make of her myself. She lies there now from morning to night, and never a word she speaks. You'd hardly know she was in the house, without she has one o' them coughing bouts come on, an' they tear her awful.

You may hear her right down to t' bottom o' t' yard. It's awkward for me, you see, ma'am, having her took in this way. If she doesn't get better enow, I may be having her dying in the house as like as not. An' she doesn't seem to have no friends nor nothing, or else I was asking at her this morning, if there wasn't anybody as she'd ought to let know about her being so bad."

"And has she none?" asked Janet.

"She never let on as she had, ma'am. She just made as if she didn't want me to be tewing at her about it. An' you see, ma'am, she isn't like a person as one could make free with. There's a summut about her out o' the common, for as poor as she seems to be."

"What is her name?" inquired Janet, her pity deepening now to interest.

"Moore, ma'am, or summut like that; but I couldn't just make out, or else she telled me when first she came. You see it was late at night when she come. She'd got in by the train, an' she was hardlins able to hold up then. She had a cup o' tea an' went to bed right away.

An' next morning when she found she couldn't start again, she just shut up as if she hadn't a word to say, and I've never got nothing out of her since."

Here Mrs. Doughty started and snuffed up the air.

"There's the muffins a catching, if you'd excuse me, ma'am. That's her door just atop o' the stair, if you'd step up."

She hurried off to look after her baking, and Janet went up the straight narrow staircase, and knocked at the door which Mrs. Doughty had pointed out.

There was no answer. She opened it softly, thinking the woman might be asleep, and went in. It was a small, uncarpeted room, with whitewashed walls, the ceiling sloping down on one side nearly to the ground. There was a little wooden wash-stand, a chair or two, and an old chest of painted drawers, on which stood a cracked looking-glass, two or three cups, and a plate with some pieces of orange upon it. Everything looked clean and tidy, but cold and comfortless in the extreme. Opposite the door

was the bed with a faded patchwork coverlet and limp chintz curtains of some dim undistinguishable hue.

The sick woman was lying with her head nearly covered by the bed-clothes; not asleep though, for she moved a little, and looked half up as the door opened, and then laid her face down again upon the pillow.

"I have brought you an order for the dispensary," said Janet, coming forward to the side of the bed; "Mrs. Doughty came this morning and said that you were ill."

The woman put out her hand and took the note. It was just the usual printed form, with Miss Brande's name, as the giver, written in the corner. She glanced at it an instant with some murmured words of thanks, and then looked up again sharply, keenly, into Janet's face. Her eyes were hollow, large, and bright, her face pinched and wan, except two hectic patches, which were burning in the midst of either cheek. Janet almost shrank from the fixed and sudden gaze.

"I have seen you before," said the woman,

"a long time ago. You don't remember me though. I daresay I am changed since then."

Janet shook her head. Yet, just at the moment, an expression flitted across the wasted face that seemed in some far-off way familiar to her.

"It was at the Bedesby station. I was passing through, and you were in the waiting-room. You have forgotten, perhaps."

And then, all at once, Janet recognised the features, altered though they were, of the beautiful girl who had come into the ladies' waiting-room that day when she had gone there herself to watch for the last glimpse of Mr. Maudsley.

"How strange!" she exclaimed; "I remember you quite well now. But, indeed, you must have seen some sad changes since then."

"I have," said the woman. "Changes, strange changes. I will see another by-and-bye, and that will be the last. This fire can't go on burning long. Feel my hand."

She laid her thin long hand outside the coverlet. Janet took it and held it in her own. She felt its feverish heat even through her glove.

"You surely did not travel in such a state as this," she said, "and at this time of the year too?"

"I did though. You see I could not bear to die in London. It stifled me. And I knew I was going to die. I felt it in me. But I was not so ill as this when I started. It was the long journey, I daresay, that did it. I was taken worse after I got here. I meant, you know, to have gone home to die. I would like to have kept up just one day longer. This is a dreary place to die in. Don't you think so?" she said, looking round the cold bare chamber.

Her eyes were glittering with a restless light. She seemed wild and excited. Janet drew nearer to her, and softly smoothed down the hot dry hand that she was still holding in her own. There was something in the action, more still in the look full of compassion and sympathy which she bent upon her, that soothed the sick woman. It fell upon her like oil on troubled waters, calming her as by a sort of magnetic influence. Some people doubtless do possess the power of thus conveying themselves for good or ill to others. How, we cannot tell; but so it is. Perhaps the physical organization may with them

be more transparent, so to speak, than it is with most, and so transmits with greater ease that mysterious spiritual essence which we call ourselves. These are the natures by whom others are unconsciously attracted or repelled, who cannot go through life regarded with indifference by those around them. They will either win to themselves a passionate attachment, an almost unreasoning devotion, or they will arouse against them feelings of open or concealed aversion.

It was so with Janet. She was almost worshipped by the poor of Marton, and by the little circle of her chosen friends, while by others with whom, though on her own level in society she felt no special affinity, she was looked upon with a feeling of quiet distaste, as one with whom it was hardly possible to keep up that fiction of surface friendship which usually prevails among the members of the Upper Ten in a rural population.

By-and-bye, as she still held her hand, the woman spoke again.

"I would have liked to have got back home if I could. It would have seemed easier dying there than here."

Her mind kept harping apparently on this idea of dying in that dreary lodging-house. Janet tried to turn her thoughts away from it.

"Do not distress yourself," she said. "It was the fatigue of the journey, no doubt, which proved too much for you. It was a long way to travel for a person in your state, and at this time of the year too. Perhaps in a few days you may be better again, and then you will be able to go forward."

But even while she spoke, Janet felt, as she looked on the thin fevered face, that it was but an empty hope which she was holding out. It was not a day or two's rest alone that was needed there.

The woman shook her head and smiled—a sad, incredulous smile. She looked very beautiful just then, with that strange, hectic glow, like the fever flush on autumn woods, that often lights up the faces of consumptive people.

Somehow Janet was reminded of that picture at the Hall which used to hang over the dining-room door, but which had been removed after Mr. Holdych had arrived. And as she looked, the

resemblance grew stronger still. She traced it in the tumbled golden hair, in the glittering eyes, in the pinched features that yet told their tale of long-past loveliness. She saw that the woman noticed the evident intentness of her gaze.

"There is a portrait so much like you," she said, "at Marton Hall."

"Is there?" exclaimed the woman, a quick light catching on her face. "It must surely be my mother's. I was like her they used to tell me, and I have heard my grandfather say that it was bought by an English gentleman who lived near Bedesby. My father died, you know, and everything was sold. How strange! I wonder whether it is. How long has it been at this place? It is many years since my father died. I was only a baby."

Janet looked into her face with new interest and surprise. It must be as she said, for in her excitement a momentary gleam, passing across the woman's countenance, brought out the resemblance more strongly than before. Strange indeed it would be if this poor friendless wanderer, whose voice and manners nevertheless betrayed her gentle breeding, should really prove to

be the child of that beautiful, bright creature with the laughing face and jewelled hands, whose portrait had so long adorned the empty dining-room at Marton Hall.

"How long has it been there?" repeated the woman, for Janet in her astonishment had not replied at first.

"It must be seven or eight and twenty years. The Hall was shut up for nearly that time, and I believe the late Mr. Holdych bought the picture not long before he went away."

The woman turned upon her a sharp, sudden glance. Her lips parted as if to speak, but before she could frame the words she was evidently about to utter, she had been seized with a convulsive fit of coughing, and was struggling, half-suffocated for breath. Janet raised her a little in the bed, supporting her as well as she was able, until the first violence of the attack had spent itself. Before it was over, however, Mrs. Doughty appeared. She had heard from the kitchen the sound of the loud tearing cough, and now came hurriedly to relieve Janet, who was still holding up the woman in her arms.

"Dear me, ma'am, to think of the likes of you

troubling yourself that way. She'll get over it soon," she added, as the gasping breath began to come more easily. "They don't last long, but she has them come on so sudden while there's no getting to her till they're very near over, without one happens to be about at the time."

Janet saw that she was not likely to be of any further use, and fearing that just now her longer stay might hardly be desired, she took her leave, promising as she did so to come again in the course of a day or two at furthest.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WANDERER'S TALE.

AS Janet groped her way down the creaking staircase, and out into the dusky street, her interest was strangely roused by what she had seen and heard during her visit to the woman. She puzzled herself to account for her apparently destitute condition, if it was really the case that the portrait at Marton Hall was that of her mother. Her father had died, she said, ruined perhaps, for all had been sold. But then she must surely have friends who could do something for her, keep her at all events out of the depths of poverty in which she was evidently plunged. For Janet, with a woman's quick perception, had marked, during the few moments she

had been in the chamber, the darned and faded shawl, the threadbare gown and rusty bonnet that were hanging on the peg behind the door. The pair of old boots, too, that stood beside the painted drawers, small, and with the high, proud curve of the arched instep plainly to be traced, but patched and mended as they would never have been if there had been the funds to buy another pair.

And on the hand which Janet had held so long folded within her own, there was no wedding-ring. She had marked that also. Perhaps the face, once so fair, had been her curse, and the far-away home, to which she had been so anxious to return to die, was one that she had shamed and saddened by her sin. For there had been at times that hard, ringing bitterness in her tones as she spoke, which want and sorrow alone, however sharp, seldom give to a woman's voice. And Janet had felt instinctively, as she looked into the glittering eyes, that it was the sense of some great wrong, endured or done, which fired them with that wild, uneasy light.

It was all conjecture, however. Yet through

the whole of the evening Janet's thoughts, as she sat at work, chatting at intervals with her aunt, kept perpetually recurring to the subject. She turned it over and over in her mind, devising in her kind heart little plans for the comfort of that poor creature lying in that dreary lodging, dying, as it seemed, and with no friend near to soothe or tend her—none but hired and half-reluctant hands to perform for her those offices which, sooner or later, we all require from others.

She felt indeed almost anxious for the next day to come, that she might return to her new protégée, and by her sympathy and help assure her that, though a stranger, she was not quite unfriended. If possible, too, so to win her confidence as to obtain some clue to the story of her life. Perhaps curiosity, in part, as well as interest, prompted her to this. It is from mingled motives often that our fairest deeds proceed, and Janet after all was a woman, nothing more, though a heart more true and tender never beat.

"She's had a awful night of it, she has, with her cough," said Mrs. Doughty, when Janet

appeared again at the muffin-shop on the afternoon of the next day. "I may say if I was up to her once, I was up half-a-dozen times. You see, ma'am, she's not fit to be left by herself when it comes on, and yet for all that you'd think she was quite put about with me going to her every time. But, then, I dursn't do aught else. I should feel it on my conscience, I'm sure, if anything was to happen. And she's had the doctor here to-day."

"And what did he say?" asked Janet.

"Why, ma'am, he doesn't say nothing, except that she's very bad, and she hadn't ought to have travelled this time of year, and she ought to have had some one to see her afore now, and she ought to have wine and jelly and that, to keep up her strength. But, then, as I said to him, says I, 'where are they to come from?' For she hasn't the means herself apparently, and it stands to reason I can't get her them, though I'd be glad to do my best for her—cooking, or nursing, or that. But you see, ma'am, I'm a widder myself and four childer, and I'm hard set sometimes to scrape enough together for us all. And it's queer

if she has friends, she doesn't let them know about her."

Mrs. Doughty seemed somewhat querulous this afternoon on the subject of her lodger, as was not unnatural, perhaps, after her hard day's work, and night of broken rest.

Janet took out of her reticule some grapes which she had brought with her for the invalid. She also gave Mrs. Doughty five shillings, telling her to procure what the doctor had ordered, and to come up to the house for some wine.

"I will go up and see her, Mrs. Doughty, if you think she will not be asleep."

"Asleep, ma'am!" said Mrs. Doughty, softened by Janet's gifts, and curtseying as she thanked her for them. "No, I'm afraid not; I don't think she sleeps night nor day. I clean pities for her, poor thing. It must be dree work lying up there; but I can't do more for her than what I do."

She opened the door of the staircase that led out of the kitchen into the chamber above. Janet went up, taking with her the bunch of grapes she had brought. This time the woman greeted her with a smile.

"I knew you would come," she said, as she put out her long thin hand to welcome her.

It was the quiet gesture of a friend receiving an equal. Janet felt pleased by this little mark of confidence. She sat down on the side of the bed, and still holding the hand she had taken in her own, began talking in her own gentle, soothing way, and in the soft low tones that fall so gratefully on ears made sensitive by illness.

"I am no better," said the woman, in answer to Janet's inquiries. "I never shall be, I feel it in me. The doctor was here this morning, but he would not say anything. I knew, though, by his face, what he thought. I can always judge of people by their faces. I knew directly I saw you yesterday that I was going to have some one to be good to me a little before I died. I was wrong once, only once. It was a terrible mistake."

She paused. Janet, too, was silent. Something held her back even now from seeking to know more than the woman chose to tell.

By-and-bye she spoke again.

"You were saying yesterday, before you went

away, that it was a Mr. Holdych who bought my mother's picture. It was her picture, I feel sure. He had a nephew, had he not? Leonard Holdych?"

She was speaking quite composedly; nothing in her eyes of the sharp, eager look of the day before. It was Janet who was agitated now.

"Do you know the name?" she asked, as she looked with startled, trembling intentness into the woman's face.

"I do. I do," she answered, in a low, sad voice.

There was a strange pathos in her tones as she uttered the words. But Janet did not notice it. A wild idea had flashed into her mind, for a moment blinding, deafening her. Yet no, it could not be. She had the hot, wasted hand even now within her own, and no wedding-ring was there. Yet how came she to know him, to be speaking thus of him? She could not ask. Her lips were as if sealed together in mute wonderment.

The woman went on.

"Is he living at this place, Marton, now?"

"No," murmured Janet. "He is abroad somewhere, travelling, I think."

"Will he soon be back? Do you know him? Could you send him a message from me?" said the woman, speaking rapidly now. "I was thinking about it last night after you were gone. I made up my mind then, if it turned out as I thought. Where is he? Do you know?"

"I could find out," answered Janet, faintly. "His banker here will know."

"Then you will do so," urged the woman, eagerly. "And soon; you will not forget. I mean to do it, and I must; and I will tell you what to say. But to-morrow—to-morrow—not to-day. I can trust you, I know, or I would not ask you. But I cannot tell you now. I must be quiet and think of it again. I can trust you?" she repeated, looking anxiously into Janet's face.

The fever spots were burning now upon her cheeks. Her eyes were bright and wild.

"Yes, yes," said Janet, her heart throbbing almost to suffocation, and her whole frame

trembling with agitation and surprise. "You may trust me. You may indeed."

"And you will come again to-morrow. But I cannot bear to talk any longer now."

Janet went away, perplexed by the mystery surrounding this stranger, and which her recent interview had but increased. What could it be she had to tell her? what message to send to Leonard? All night her thoughts tossed around the question, vainly striving to disentangle it. Towards morning she slept, a restless, fitful sleep, but into it there fell a dream that calmed her troubled mood.

She was standing by the sea-shore, alone at night. She could see nothing round her, only through the darkness hear the roaring of the breakers at her feet. And as she stood, presently above the tumult of the waves, she heard a voice pronounce her name. It was Leonard's, calling to her from across the sea that rolled between them. While she listened, troubled and perplexed, for she could not follow the voice that called, she felt through the gloom a cold hand take her own. She shuddered back. It seized and held

it fast. It drew her swiftly into the tide. Then it loosed its hold, and she felt herself drifted onwards by the billows till she was cast at last upon the shore. She looked around her. It was light now, the serene and brilliant light of a cloudless sunset sky. There was no sea; she was lying on the grassy slope of a mountain. The voice was calling to her still, and far away near the summit, she saw one who she knew was Leonard, she stretched up her arms to him, he reached down out of the distance, and as their hands met and clasped, she woke.

It was the first time since their parting that she had seen him, even in her dreams. And all the morning, like a sound of rippling music, the memory of it mingled with her thoughts. A brooding calm took the place of her recent restless wonder. She said nothing of it, however. It was not a thing to be spoken of. Nor did she tell her aunt the reason of the sudden interest she felt in the woman to whom she had taken the dispensary note. But in the afternoon, when Miss Mildred had lain down for her usual siesta, and she had wrapped the sofa rug warmly round her,

she went out herself, to pay her promised visit to the mysterious stranger.

The room looked more comfortable than it had done before. Mrs. Doughty had put a clean dimity cover on the bed in place of the old patched quilt. There was a small one spread on the drawers too, and a morsel of fire burning in the grate. And as the woman lay upon the bed, waiting for her visitor, with her blue gleaming eyes and fever-flushed face, and the thick golden hair smoothed now around her head, she looked strangely beautiful, Janet thought.

"Sit down here," she said, "and let me hold your hand. How is it, I wonder, that I feel so near to you? Inwardly near, I mean. You know, I daresay, what it is. There is something in your eyes, I think, that draws me to you. They shelter me. They seem like a home. And I have been homeless so long—so long!"

She seemed half-rambling for a few moments in her talk, though whether she was so in reality or not, Janet could not tell. By-and-bye she closed her eyes for a moment, then opened them again and fixed them on her visitor.

"I must tell you about that message. It is a long one to trouble you with, yet somehow I am not afraid of asking you to do it. But I must begin quite at the beginning to make you understand. I told you about my father dying when I was still a baby. People thought he was rich when he married my mother. I suppose it was what is called a good match. However, when he died he left nothing behind him. That was how her picture had to be sold. And then she went back with me to the Manse of Bervie, where her father was the minister.

"I remember what a happy childhood I had in the old manse. And as I grew up, my mother and my grandfather used to teach me; so that I never had to go away from home. But at last those days came to an end. My mother died. She had a long and painful illness; and after that my grandfather's health too began to fail, so that he had to engage a helper. I knew then that he could ill afford to keep me idle at home; so after long thinking I made up my mind to go out as a governess. I was proud, too, and did not like to eat bread I had not earned, even

though it was his. Besides, I wanted to see more of the world than I could in a quiet little village like Bervie.

"I had hard work to persuade him to let me go. At last he consented, and I got a situation in the family of a nobleman who lived near Edinburgh. It was a great thing to do, I thought, though I was not to have a very high salary. How proud and glad I felt when I set off one bright August day, and thought that now I should be able to do something to help at home, instead of being a burden! But I little knew what was the drudgery and humiliation of a governess's life. I saw the world, it is true, but I saw it through prison bars. I felt like a lady, yet I was treated as a servant. I tried hard to please, and I daresay I did, as they say, 'give satisfaction;' but I was miserable indeed, that first year. I had no one to be kind to me, and kindness was what I lived upon, and at the manse it had been like my daily food. I was sorely tempted often to give it up, only I thought of our narrow means at home, and determined to keep on.

"At last I came back to Bervie for my holiday. I had been away a year. And then what a strange light flashed into my life! There was an English gentleman staying there. He had come for the shooting; and after I came home he used often to come to the manse with game for my grandfather. And then he would stay a long time, talking with me. And whenever I went into the woods or down by the river, I was sure to meet him. Somehow we seemed to be always together. And he made me love him. I could not help it. I forgot my grandfather, my dear old grandmother. He was my world, my life, my all. But at last he went away. And the next week I too had to go back to my situation. He had asked me for my Edinburgh address, and said that he was going there soon and should find me out. So I went back almost gladly, for I thought he would be sure to come.

"But he never did. All the winter went by, and a long pain kept dragging at my heart; and in the spring the family I was with went up to London. Then I thought I should surely see

him, for I knew it was there he lived. I used to watch for him when I went out with my pupils in the parks to walk; but it was all in vain; and my heart began to go dead within me. I grew more and more wretched too in my situation. I felt like a caged wild animal. Oh, how I used to long sometimes for my liberty, for just one breath of the free mountain air!"

The woman paused for a moment. She had been holding Janet's hand, and looking in her face all the time. Then she went on.

"At last, one evening, this Mr. Holdych came to the house."

Janet was listening quietly. Nothing betrayed the whirl of agitation which these words produced.

"I always had to sit in the drawing-room with the young ladies in an evening. It was torture to me. I used to feel myself 'the governess' all over; slighted and neglected as I sat silent among the company; and yet I knew I was on a level with many of the people there, for a minister is a gentleman, even if he is poor. And I knew that I was beautiful—more beautiful by far than my young ladies. And they were jealous of it

too, and tried by petty insults to make me feel my inferiority in other things. But though none of the visitors ever spoke to me, I saw often their glances of admiration, and I gloried in my golden hair and queenly form. Yet I did so long sometimes for more than that, I did—just for some one to be friendly to me, if it were ever so little. Only one crumb of kindness, and I never got it.

"But Mr. Holdych, the night when first he came, treated me like a lady. I felt lifted up to my own place. He sat by me and talked to me, and when my mistress noticed it, and told me it was time for the young ladies to retire, he got up and opened the door, and bowed and smiled brightly at me as I passed out. He came again a few nights after, and it was just the same, only he lingered longer by me, and looked at me as none but Douglas Græme had ever done before."

But as she uttered this name the quietness shivered out of the woman's face, and Janet's hand which she held still in hers was pressed suddenly in a nervous, tightened clasp.

"I did not mean to have told you who he was," she said, in a sharp voice, and scanning her countenance as she spoke with her eager, glittering eyes. But never mind, I can trust you, and it will not matter soon. It is years since I ever spoke his name. And yet just now I felt as if I were loving him again. Perhaps that made me say it. But I was telling you about Mr. Holdych. That first evening when he came was very pleasant. It was like cool water to my thirst. But the second, it was different. I saw people glance at us and smile, and my mistress, too, seemed vexed and flurried. At last she made some excuse, and sent me away with the young ladies, and then called her eldest daughter back. I knew what it all meant. Ah, what angry bitter tears I shed as I sat alone in my chamber, and looked out over the house-roofs through the foggy moonlight! Why need they have grudged me just an hour's talk, I thought, with some one who did not seem to despise me for being a governess. But after that evening I was never told again to come down to the drawing-room when there was company. I did not

care much about it, only it seemed a sort of insult, and I chafed at it. The young ladies said once or twice, that Mr. Holdych had been, and that he had asked after me, and their mamma had said that I was out. And then they laughed and giggled, and I felt even more bitter than before.

"At last one day—it would be about a fortnight from the day when first he came—I had gone with my two youngest pupils into the park, and then he came to us and joined me. He must have been watching, I think, for my coming out; for one of them said he had been walking behind us all the time. I was glad to see him, for he had been kind to me, and yet I felt terribly uneasy with him beside me there. But think how I was bewildered when he drew my arm within his own, and led me on away beneath the trees, with the children behind us, and told me that he loved me—ay, me, poor governess as I was—and besought me, wildly, passionately urged me, to become his wife.

"It confounded me. I did not know what to say. I could only refuse him in a broken sort of

way, again and again, as he kept pleading on. I could not love him, you know, when I loved already. And yet I felt humbled, almost frightened before him as he pressed his suit. For he seemed as if he would not be denied, and yet I could not grant him what he asked.

"I must have stayed out a long time, though I did not know it, for it was long past the children's tea-time when we got home. And in the evening their mamma came up to the schoolroom and dismissed me on the spot. They had told her, surely, about that walk in the park, for she seemed as if she could not speak to me angrily enough. Such cruel, cutting words she said, and then she gave me my salary to the end of the quarter, and said I could stay all night if I chose, but I was not fit to continue longer in the house. I tried to answer her, but I could only break down into sobbing. It was too dreadful. How could I go back home, disgraced, dismissed? I had done no wrong, yet I almost felt as if I had. And she had spoken so loudly too: every one in the house must know. It seemed a thing too terrible to be borne. I packed up my boxes that

night, but I never went to bed. I was too utterly wretched and ashamed for that.

"The next day, a servant fetched a cab to take me to the station. I saw the ugly leer upon his face as he brought my boxes to the door, and I shrank so from going home to the manse. I felt as if all the Bervie people too would know of my disgrace. But when I got out at the station, the first face I saw was that of Mr. Holdych. He had found out, somehow, all about it. And when he told me how grieved he was for all the trouble he had caused me, and entreated me again so earnestly to listen to him, I felt myself begin to waver. It was only about ten minutes altogether that I had to wait, but before I started he had wrung a promise from me. That old love that I had cherished so long seemed hopeless now, and I thought, if I married him, I should escape from the grinding drudgery of my governess life, and from the stain and disgrace I was smarting under now. Besides, though I had no love for him myself, and I told him so again and again, I was not proof against his for me.

"He came to Bervie a day or two after,

travelling all night, and staying, after all, only an hour or two. It was settled then, and the time of our marriage fixed for September. It was very soon, for it was far on already in July, but he was impatient, and would not have it any longer delayed. That was the only time he came. He held a government appointment, he was a Queen's Messenger, you know, and just then he was not able to leave his post, even for a day. I had hardly time to get my things ready before the wedding day arrived. We were married at the manse, one sunny September morning. But hardly an hour after all was over, there came a man dashing up on horseback to the house, with a telegram that he was bringing for my husband. He was my husband then, you know, and I was his wife.

"He was summoned away immediately to London. I can see, even now, his furious face as he read the paper that he had taken from the man. But he was obliged to go, there was no help for it, and no time either to be lost. He bade me farewell. I could have cried out for pain as he pressed my hand till my rings nearly cut into my flesh. Then he mounted the mes-

senger's horse and rode off to the nearest station. He would just be able to reach it and catch the train passing through for Edinburgh and on to London. He did not know, he said, how long he would have to stay. Perhaps a week, perhaps more; for he would have in all probability to go on to the Continent; but the moment he was released he would come back and fetch me.

"We stood at the manse door, my grandfather and I, and watched him away till at last he turned the corner in the road, and we could see nothing but the cloud of dust that his horse's hoofs had raised. And then I went back into the house and took off my wedding clothes, and helped my grandmother to make all straight again after the bustle which the marriage had caused.

"It was the next day, in the afternoon, that I went out to walk by myself by the river side. It seemed so strange to know that I was his wife now, and yet for everything to be so exactly the same as it had been before, except that the company were all gone and the business of preparation over. There was a waterfall away down

the river, with a swift stream rushing beneath it, where I used often to go. I sat down now on an old tree trunk that stretched out by the water, and began to think it all over. All at once I heard a step, some one on the other side the hedge, with a gun over his shoulder. In another moment he came in sight. It was *He*, striding along across the stubble field. I felt a great pang, of joy and trouble both, and then I sat still, trembling, and waiting until he should come up.

"He laid down his gun and sat down beside me on the tree trunk. All the old love came surging back within me. When he looked at me, when he spoke, when he held my hand in his, I forgot I was a wife. I forgot all except how wildly I had loved him, loved him still. Turn your eyes away. I cannot tell you if you look so at me. He never came to the manse, but I saw him again and again. I was mad, I was wicked. But I knew nothing save the great love I bore him. I could not choose but listen when he spoke. And his words fell like fire into my heart. They dried up all but that torrent of

love. I thought no more of my grey-haired grandfather, of my grandmother's gentle looks. I thought of neither right nor wrong, but when he bade me I went with him."

The woman paused and drew her hand away from Janet's.

"I shock you with my story," she said; "you look almost scared. Your face is white. Your lips are quivering. I will give over now. Shall I? Only I must finish it another day. You will hear it to the end, will you not? But it is a pity, for I feel quite strong just now, hardly ill at all."

"No, no. Go on," said Janet, recovering herself. It had been cruel work listening, yet she felt as if she could not wait another day for what was yet to come. But though she kept her place by the woman's side, she did not take again the hand that had lain so long in hers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WRONGS.

THE woman went on with her tale.

"I took nothing with me, only an old bonnet that I knew would not be missed, and went down very early one morning to the river side, while the dew lay still upon the grass. I often used to do so, to sit and read on the mossy trunk that stretched out over the water. He had left Bervie two days before. People thought no doubt that he was gone back to England. But he was coming again from Edinburgh by the night train, and was to bring a chaise for me from a place ten miles away. I was to meet him in a lane just past the cascade, and we were to go away together. But first I went down to my old

trunk and parted the reeds and long grasses that grew near its roots upon the brink, as though some one had stepped and slipped into the river. Then I threw my garden hat among the reeds, and laid my book where I had used to sit. I thought—God forgive me for it—that the wrong would be less if they knew nothing of it at home. I could bear that they should sorrow for me dead, but I could not have endured the thought of leaving a soiled name behind me for others to cast up against them.

"When I had done this, I went across the defile into the lane that led into the Kinfauns road, and there he had a carriage waiting, and a tartan cloak with a hood, which he made me put on, and then we drove on fast to a station on the line eight or ten miles away. My face was hidden with my veil and the hood, so that, even if any one had seen me, they would hardly have recognised me. However, we got to the station without meeting any of the Bervie people, and there we took the train and went on to Edinburgh, and so through Bedesby to London. It was then I saw you. He put me into a corner seat, and took the place just opposite

to me. I fancied the people in the carriage looked curiously at me, but, with his eye upon me, I felt as if nothing could harm me. It was like a wall of fire about me, keeping away everything but the thought of himself.

"It was very late when we reached London. We only remained there one night, and the next day began to travel again. He took me on to the Continent. We went up the Rhine, moving slowly on, and staying at the quaint old cities that I had read about, but never thought to see. All was more wonderful, more beautiful and strange, than even in my dreams I had pictured to myself. It must have been an enchanted life I led for those first weeks after my flight from home. I felt no remorse, no fear. I just gave myself up to that long trance of joy. If a thought of the past came before me—of my old home at Bervie, of the husband whom I had so cruelly wronged, of the friends who even now were mourning for my fancied death, I thrust it resolutely away, as a thing with which I could never now have any more concern. I had put a great gulf between myself and all the associations of my former life, which

might not, even by a thought, be crossed. And I would not look forward either. I just lived in the present. I was with him, and that was enough.

"And for awhile how happy I was! How he loaded me with love, such as I had never imagined it could be mine to know. But at length, slowly, he began to change. I felt it, but I would not see it. It would be too terrible to lose what I had given my all to gain. I crushed back fiercely every vague suspicion that all was not as once it was. But at last I could not hide it, even from myself. It was the old story. It has been told many times before. It will be told many times again."

And as she spoke an angry light gleamed wildly for a moment in the woman's eyes.

"We were in Paris. We had been there several days. One evening he came in, after leaving me all the day alone. It was growing dusk, and I had got tired of sitting at the window watching the leaves shivering in the sharp autumnal blast. It was chill, too, and the black stove in the corner of the room looked so dark and cheerless, so dif-

ferent from our own bright open fires, that are like companions to us when we are alone. I felt nervous and dispirited. I longed so for him to come back, just to break the spell of this miserable silence. I strained my eyes to catch sight of him among the crowds who were passing to and fro along the street. I should have known his figure among a thousand, even in the flaring, unsteady lamplight.

"But I watched in vain. I waited until I felt sick with disappointment, and still he did not come. At last I heard wheels stop suddenly at the door of the house. I looked down from the window, but a projecting balcony kept me from seeing anything. It was he at last, though. The next moment I heard his voice, as if he were speaking to some one inside the carriage, and then I heard a woman's voice reply in clear sparkling tones, and directly after he ran up the stairs and came hastily into the room. I sprang up to meet him. All the long weary day was forgotten now. But he only gave me a careless caress, and then shook me off impatiently. He wanted an opera-glass, he said, and then he was going again. He

was in haste, he said, and bade me help to seek it. But it was too much; I could not bear it; I had wearied for him so; and while I was beginning to beg of him to stay, my lips quivered, and I broke down in a great choking sob.

"I could not help it, though I was angry with myself for giving way. He seemed vexed, too, and spoke sharply to me about being so fretful and foolish. And with that my pride was roused. What I said I hardly know, but he answered me with words of cruel scorn. He taunted me with what I was, and when he had found what he wanted, he went away, bidding me learn to smile instead of whimper if I cared to keep his love.

"They say that women are more easily overcome by a slight pain than men; and perhaps they are. But they can gather themselves up more resolutely to sustain a great shock of anguish. I let the molten agony fall hissing into my heart, and made no sign. But when he was gone, I stood as if rooted to the spot where he had left me. The terrible name that he had called me by seemed written in blazing letters on

everything I saw. His love! The bandage was torn from my eyes now. The truth, the horrible truth, was staring me in the face. A few moments ago I had been weeping with grieved affection. Now my tears were all scorched up by bitter, burning hate. You do not know, I daresay, what it is to hate one you love. For I did love him still, and it was that, like a tortured nerve, that made my misery.

"I heard him drive away, and then there was but one thing to do. I went to my room and dressed myself quickly in the plainest, darkest clothes I had. I gathered together my few trinkets and what little money I had, and stole out, without saying anything to the people of the house, into the streets. I went down alleys and byways, losing my way and finding it again, till at last I reached the station. There was a train starting in half an hour for Boulogne. I got into it, and then took the steamer and crossed over to England. I wanted to make my way to London and get employment of some kind before my little stock of money was exhausted. I thought I could manage to do so, for I was a

good needlewoman and embroideress. It was no use trying to get a situation as governess again. You cannot do that without a character, and I had none, or worse than none; for though I had my wedding-ring upon my finger, I felt as if every one must see what I was upon my face.

"But even such work as I would have been content to do, was not easily to be had. The shops all said they were not wanting fresh hands. It was the slack season, and they had as many already as they could employ. It galled me to have to go about asking for employment as a beggar would ask for bread—I, with the pride and bearing of a lady, to submit myself to the rude rebuffs and ruder stares I had to meet with from the pert London shopmen. But I struggled through it, and at last I succeeded. It was at a shop where they made and sold children's dresses, and one of their young people was ill. I did the fine braiding and embroidery, and for a good while, with what I got there, and chance work that I picked up besides, made as much by hard work as I could contrive to live decently upon.

"But after awhile I grew unable for this.

My strength began to fail me, and I had to take long rests over my work; and resting with me meant starving afterwards to make up for it. One day a Quaker lady came to the place where I lived, to give me instructions about some work I was doing for her. It was a baby's cloak, and as I sat working at it, I had been thinking fearfully of my own coming motherhood, and the destitution it must bring with it. She had a quiet, placid face, and a voice as fresh and soft as the rippling murmurs of the burn that ran at the foot of the manse garden at home.

"When she had given me her orders, she went on talking to me, asking me if I had any other means of living than what I got by my needle. Somehow I was drawn to tell her of the sore need I was in. She was so gentle and humble herself that she took all my pride away. I could bear even to have her pity me, and, more than that, relieve me. For when she went away, she put half-a-crown into my hand as she bade me farewell. It was the first money I had ever received that I had not earned. I would have died sooner than I would have asked alms of

any one. But there was a courtesy in all her ways, though I was nothing but a starving needlewoman, that made even her charity easy to receive.

"She was very kind to me after that. Quakers often are. She got me a ticket for a London hospital, and there my child was born. How I won through that time I hardly know. It seems to me now like a black, burning dream. If ever I prayed as I knelt in my little white bedroom at Bervie manse, I prayed then, that the merciful God would be pleased to let me lay down the terrible burden of life. But the heavens seemed brass above me. It was as if that blank white ceiling thrust down my prayers to me again. I had mixed my cup, and I drank it to the dregs.

"My child was dead. I thanked God for it. I could not have borne to have looked into its baby face, and thought that its whole life must be darkened by the shadow of its mother's sin. The people of the hospital gave me some money when I went out. There was a fund for that purpose. One day, when I was getting better and was

sitting up at the window, I saw a gentleman walking swiftly down the street. As he passed by the iron box at the gate I noticed that he slipped in a piece of folded paper. Next day I heard one of the hospital nurses say that a hundred-pound note had been found in the box at night. I thought of what I had seen the day before, and wondered whether that poor note had been meant to atone for some measureless wrong that could never be undone.

"I should have been poorly off when I came out, without the little help they gave me, for the shop I worked for had got some one else to supply my place, and I was a long time before I could find employment again. At last I got it at a mantle warehouse. I used to take the work home to do. Sometimes I managed to make a pretty good living; at others, when the season was slack, I nearly starved. You don't know what it is to be beautiful and starving. Thank God for it. I was beautiful still; and I knew it well. A woman has to be sore pressed indeed before she ceases to have a certain pride in her own beauty. But nature makes mistakes

sometimes; I don't blame her for it. But a fair face is a terrible gift to a starving woman.

"Sometimes, as I went out at night to take home work that I had toiled since daylight to finish, I would meet with gentlemen who would look at me, as I hurried past, with eyes that scorched me through. Ay, and men they were, some of them, with wives and young daughters at home, men who were to be seen Sunday after Sunday in their pews at church, but whose faces were scrawled over, for those who could read it, with the devil's own handwriting.

"But I shock you," said the woman, changing abruptly from her tone of passionate invective to one of frigid composure. "Ladies like you are not supposed to know of the mud and slime through which a woman who has the misfortune to be poor and friendless, must wade, if she would keep body and soul together. You need not be afraid, though," she added, with a sudden gesture of pride; "I was cold often and hungry; but I bore it. And a sore fight it was sometimes. It's a dour pain is hunger. You don't know what it is."

Janet did not speak. For her only answer she took again the wasted hand that lay outside the coverlet and folded it tenderly within her own. This poor sinner had suffered too.

The caress soothed the sick woman. She leaned her head back, and looked wistfully at Janet. The angry light ebbed back from her eyes.

"How soft your hand is!" she said at last. "It minds me of my mother's. She used to do just so as I sat by her bedside when she was ill. Ah! how I used to long often through that weary time to have her back, to lay my head just for one moment on that kind breast, to see that dear face again, and hear her call me by that sweet home name that once was mine. No one ever called me by it now. No one even knew it. For I was alone there in that great crowded city. Even the kind Quaker lady was gone. I had no one to work for; none to live for. Wherever I looked, I met only vacancy—a vast measureless void which nothing in life could fill.

"It felt the worst when I went to church. For a long time I never went anywhere. I could

not bear to sit down in the great gloomy London churches and think of the little bright kirk at Bervie, where my grandfather used to preach, and where on summer mornings we could hear through the open door, as we sat in our pew, the babbling of the burn that ran by the foot of the churchyard, and the music of the wind among the pine-woods on the side of the hill. Besides, it was no use my going to church. They seemed to be always saying over—'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.' And I could not, no—I could not—though, God knows, I did try hard sometimes to do so.

"But one Sabbath morning I was passing by a church, a good way from where I lived. I had gone for a walk. It was the only chance I had to escape from the smoke and racket of the streets, and get a glint of the green trees and the blue lift. It came on to rain just as I got near, and I went in for shelter. But whenever the clergyman began to speak, I knew directly that he belonged to my own country. I sat listening to his voice, drinking in his words, for they sounded like music in my ears. They seemed full of

echoes from the old home that lay so far away among the Scottish hills. I went again and again every Sabbath while I was able to walk so far. He only preached in the morning. At night there used to be a curate, a young Englishman, and I did not care to go then.

"Your service is very different from ours, yet I grew to like it, especially the Litany. It used to be a great rest to follow the minister in some of those wailing petitions, and I learnt at last sometimes almost to say even that one which was so hard at first.

"But, oh! what a mockery those words used to seem—'The Communion of Saints.' They came over twice every morning. But what meaning had they for me? There, in that household of faith, I had no place. I stayed the communion one morning, but I never did it again. I knelt down among the rest and took the cup from the minister's hands, but I was as far from them all as if I had been in another world. They were good Christians, I daresay, many of them," and as she spoke, the old mocking light gleamed back into the woman's eyes. "They read their bible. Ah,

yes, but there was an apocryphal leaf bound up with it, a leaf out of the Gospel of Mammon. What should they do seeking after the poor needlewoman who sat there with her dreary face and shabby shawl, Sabbath after Sabbath, and who couldn't afford so much as to pay for her sitting in the church?

"But I didn't mean to get angry again," she said, her voice subsiding to a softer tone. "They could not help it, I daresay. They did not know—how could they?—how hungry the poor soul was that came there week by week, for just a crumb or two of all that fell from their well-spread table.

"I worked for that mantle-shop four or five years. I got enough to keep body and soul together, and one clings to life, you know, even if it holds only weariness or pain. I had ceased though to feel as wretched as once I was. I was growing numbed, I think, and had lost all feeling for anything. I seemed to have got drifted away from the past. It was like a severed limb, that was my own, yet belonged to me no more. I did not deserve to be able to forget it, yet I was doing

so. But one day I had it suddenly thrust back upon me. I saw my husband!"

Janet's heart beat thick and faintly. She listened on.

"It was one night, late. I had been taking home some work, not to the shop, but to a place two miles from where I lived. It was generally dark when I went out, I could not afford to use up daylight, besides, somehow, I was always afraid of being seen, and I felt safer in the dark. I was a long way from home when it came on a tremendous storm, and I ran under a colonnade for shelter. I stood a good while, for the rain kept on, and then, turning by accident, I found myself facing him. My senses seemed to leave me for the moment. Then I turned and rushed out, I hardly knew where. I did not go straight home, I was afraid of being followed; but wandered about, drenched and shivering, till past midnight. I was always in terror after that, of meeting him again. I never did though. It is like a little world, you know, is London.

"But that night was the beginning of the end. I got a cough that never went away, and then I

began to feel my strength fail me. I had a pain in my side, and it tired me more than it used, sitting so close at my needle. I got a dispensary note from a city missionary who came sometimes to see me. The doctor saw that what I wanted was rest, and he told me I must take plenty of support, and go into the open air as much as I could.

"I thanked him for his advice. But it was little use to me. How was I to get time for rest, or money to buy meat and wine? When I had paid my rent, and for coals and candles, it was little I had left to live upon. Tea and dry bread, that was all. Sometimes I got only the bread. I grew worse. It was likely I should. Sometimes I was not able to do more than two or three days' work in the week, and the people at the shop said their customers complained at their orders being delayed. I knew that by-and-bye I should have to give up work altogether. The dispensary doctor had told me it was consumption. He said it had been brought on most likely by over-work and poor living. He seemed a kind-hearted man, and one day when I went he asked

me if I had not any friends I could go to for awhile.

"I told him 'no.' But after I had left him and got back to my cold empty garret, his words kept coming back to me. I knew that '*for awhile*,' meant until I died. Consumptive people fancy mostly that they will get well again. But I never did. I felt within me that the end was coming. All day and all night long I thought about that quiet, far off home. I did not know whether my grandfather or grandmother were living still, but I wearied sore as I lay upon my bed in the long dark nights, for just one sight of the blue hills round Bervie. I thought I could die more easily if I knew that I should lie in that mountain churchyard, where the burn babbled below, and the summer sunshine lay more bright and golden on the long green grass, than ever I had seen it anywhere else.

"It came over me like a feverish thirst that would not be allayed. They say sick people often have these longings before they die, drawing them back to make their grave in their own native soil. But Bervie was hundreds of miles away from

London. It would take two days at least to get there, except travelling by the express, and that I could not do, for I had no money to go with. I had pawned my things one by one, even my wedding ring, till I had nothing left but my watch.

"It was a small gold one that had been my mother's; and when I went out as a governess, my grandmother gave it me. I had worn it ever since. I never could bear even to think of parting with it, for it was all I had of hers.

"But I was obliged to let it go. I had nothing else that I could get money on. I wrapped myself up one day and took it to the pawnshop where I had been before. The man looked sharply at me when I offered it to him. He thought, I daresay, that I had stolen it. Half-starved needlewomen don't often have gold watches of their own to dispose of. He asked me a good many questions. However at last he let me have six pounds upon it. It was worth a great deal more, but I was glad to get even that. It would be enough, I knew, to pay my rent and what few debts I had and take me back to Bervie.

"I was worse again for two or three days after that; but the next week I was better, and I was impatient to start. I thought if I waited much longer I might not be able to go at all. I knew Bedesby was about half-way, and I determined to make one day's journey there and go forward the next to Bervie. But I did not know how weak I was. Before I got to Bedesby, I knew that I was going to be ill again, and my heart misgave me that I should not be able to travel on the morrow. There was a motherly-looking woman got into the carriage the last station before Bedesby. I asked her if she could tell me of a quiet place where I could stay all night. I said I was afraid I might be laid up for a day or two —and she told me of this. The person was a decent woman she said, and would look to me if I wanted for anything. So I came. But I shall never go away again until I go out to the graveyard."

She leaned back, exhausted. The fever flush had died out of her face, her hands were chill and trembling.

"You have talked too long," said Janet, anxiously; "I should not have let you do it."

She rose and poured out a little wine into a glass from the bottle that stood upon the drawers.

The woman drank it.

"I want you to send him word now that I am here. Dying, tell him, dying; not living to be a clog or a curse to him. Perhaps he may come; I would like to know that he forgives me, for he did love me once, though I never loved him, and he knew it well. Promise me, will you? To-night—do not wait until to-morrow."

And Janet promised. A strange message truly, that she was burdened with; a strange sad secret that she had learned as she sat by the wanderer's bedside. For a moment she felt herself recoiling, as she looked on the wasted features over which had been drawn the scar which no hand but that of Death might ever cover. Then she drew near again and softly bade her farewell. What human being may dare to despise another for the sin which God can forgive?

CHAPTER XIX.

"FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES."

IT was nearly a fortnight after the letter had been sent, and no answer had as yet been received to the message it contained; and daily, as Janet went to visit the woman, she found her either restless with excitement, or lying faint and prostrate after her feverish attacks. The flame of life was burning more and more unsteadily, flashing up at times, then seeming as if a single breath might puff it out. She might last some weeks, the doctor said, or she might go any time.

Janet had engaged a nurse to sit up with her at night, but Mrs. Doughty still waited on her during the day. She was a decent, kind woman at heart; and now that her fears about payment

were relieved, attended efficiently to her lodger's wants. Janet went daily to see her—a true angel of mercy, ministering both to soul and body, as need might be; soothing or sustaining, speaking words of tenderness and truth, holding the poor lost one's hand as she trod doubtfully among the shadows of the dark valley of death.

For the end was not far off now, though neither of them knew how very near it was.

It was one Sunday that Janet went in as she was on her way to church. She had meant to stay only a few minutes, and then go on; but the woman looked at her with such pleading eyes when she rose to go, that she could not find it in her heart to leave her.

So she stayed; and as she sat by the dying woman, spoke to her, in her own earnest, humble way, of the things concerning her peace. She sat a long time, silent sometimes, except as her presence was itself like an unspoken benediction.

At last she thought the woman slept. She was lying quite straight on the bed. Her eyes were closed; she was breathing softly and quietly as a sleeping child. Janet looked down on the

poor wan face, on the thin hands folded so peacefully on the coverlet, and a strange sense of awe crept over her, as she thought that this human soul, which but a while ago had been looking through those dim eyes into her face, would, in a few days or weeks at farthest, have escaped from its prison-house of flesh—would have learned the mystery which the wisest among us desire in vain to look into.

While she was thinking thus, the woman opened her eyes. They met Janet's resting on her. "Kneel down," she whispered; "I want you to say, 'Forgive us our trespasses'——"

And Janet knelt, and with hushed, solemn voice, said that beautiful prayer, that little child's prayer, in which He who knew the deepest wants of every human soul has taught us to tell out all our need.

"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

There was a long pause. Janet hid her face in the coverlet. In her heart she was praying still.

At length the woman spoke again. "Stay by

me," she said; "you go so far off. 'And the woman was left alone with Jesus;' I know now what that means. Everything seems going away from me."

Janet leaned down her face over the poor, trembling hand, which she kept still so closely clasped in hers. For a long time there was silence in the room. At last Janet lifted her head.

She was alone!

The frail house of clay, beautiful even in its decay, lay there still. But the spirit that had sinned and sorrowed in it through so many weary years, was gone.

While Janet was yet gazing, hushed and awe-struck, on the still countenance of the dead, she heard a sudden commotion in the kitchen at the foot of the stairs, and Mrs. Doughty's voice speaking to some one who had apparently come in. She supposed it had been the nurse, come to sit up during the night—no need for that now—and was going down to speak to her, when she was met by Mrs. Doughty herself on the staircase, just below the door.

"It's a gentleman that's come to see her. I told him that there was a lady in, and he said he'd wait. But I thought you'd excuse my making free to tell you. You see, ma'am, I was just agate washing the childer to put them to bed, and there isn't a place decent for him to sit hisself down in."

Janet's thoughts leaped at once to the truth. At the same moment a voice spoke to one of the children. It was he, Leonard, come at last—now, when it was too late. For a moment she shrank from meeting him again, here, and thus.

"Ask him to come up, Mrs. Doughty."

It was nearly dark in the narrow staircase. Mrs. Doughty could not see the pallor on Janet's face, though she observed the tremor in her voice.

Janet drew back into the room. She heard the footsteps coming up the stairs. The next moment Leonard stood in the low doorway, gray and haggard she thought; as well he might be, for he had been travelling almost without intermission for the last two days and nights. The letter with the message had arrived at Munich a

day or two after he himself had left it, and had only reached him at last three days ago, covered with defaced addresses.

They met very quietly. They might almost have been strangers. He just touched her hand and let it go again. Neither of them just then had quite the mastery of themselves.

"It is all over," said Janet, in a low voice. "She is gone."

And moving aside as she spoke, Leonard looked past her and saw the dead face upon the pillow. Beneath that awful shadow he gathered back his strength. And standing there together by that motionless, deserted form, in a few brief words Janet told him the sad tale of sin and suffering which she had heard from the lips sealed down now in the silence of death. She told him, too, how the poor wanderer had longed to return once again to her old home at Bervie, and to lie down for her last rest in the green churchyard there.

She finished her tale quietly, as he listened to it, then left him at the house and went back to her aunt's. She did not see him again. He went away the next day into Scotland, to Bervie,

for he meant to take the dead there to bury. And that same afternoon Mr. Brande returned from London, and Janet went home with him to the Priory House.

No one knew who it was who was laid that dim January afternoon in that grave in Bervie churchyard. There was no name, only the initials "I. M." and the date of the death upon the coffin-plate. And on the slab of grey granite that covered her last resting-place was nothing to tell who slept below. For though Leonard had forgiven the wrong done to him by the dead, he could not bring himself to give her, even on her tombstone, the name she had dishonoured in her life.

The old minister and his wife were both dead, and a stranger came out of the Manse to perform those last offices which the simple Scottish customs require. Leonard lifted his hat while the coffin was being lowered into the vault. He stood for a moment with bowed head as he heard the earth rattle on the lid that covered the dust of Isabel Moir. Then he went away. The bitterness of the past lay buried in the grave

that he was leaving behind him. And before him, in the home to which he was returning, were garnered hopes that filled every thought of the future with life, and light, and joy.

For what hindered now that Janet should share it with him?

CHAPTER XX.

AT LAST.

IT was dusk when Leonard reached Marton the next day, an early dusk, for the sky was overcast with clouds that gave warning of a snow-storm by-and-bye; and as he drove through the cedar walk and across the park, the clumps of leafless trees scattered across the wide sweep of turfy ground, and the long black line of pines that skirted the wood, showed like dark shadows only against the murky sky.

But what mattered the grey gloom without, or the chill fireless rooms within the Hall? It was all one just now to Leonard, cold and wearied though he was after that dull winter day's journey. Poor Mrs. Grant looked quite aghast

when her master appeared thus unexpectedly, and no preparation made for his reception. For he had sent no word of his arrival, and the news of his hasty return from abroad had not yet travelled from Bedesby, where, indeed, scarcely any one knew of it, to the Hall.

But he only stayed long enough to take a hasty meal and change his travel-stained apparel. Then he set off through the wood on his way to the Priory House. He strode impatiently along, crunching beneath his feet the crisp frost upon the path. The life rose so strong again within him. It was a child's gladness that he felt, a giant's force, a man's deep, earnest joy—intense, supreme, deep, and full, and high, beyond all power of thought to compass its extent. In truth this love of his was not a thing to be measured and understood, but as a door in his soul, opening into the Infinite itself.

Janet was sitting alone in the firelight, when Hannah opened the dining-room door and showed Leonard in. They were pleasant thoughts, surely, that, like a lamp within an alabaster vase, shone through upon her face.

Or, perhaps, it had been only the glow from the dancing flames that were playing over it. She started up when he entered, as if with a sudden impulse towards him, then checked herself, and stood still, quietly and a little flushed, beside her chair.

But Leonard opened his arms to her.

"Janet, come here. This is your own place now."

He had her at last, all his own, folded fast and warmly to his heart. No need to put away any more the cup which he had hardly lifted to his thirsty lips.

Who may tell the unuttered joy of that first communion—its deep delight, its safety and content—the nearness of those two souls that so long had been looking on one another apart? It was the resurrection morning of that dead hope of his which had been laid with such sighs and bitter mourning in its grave. It was an hour that held within it all the light that had passed out of the weary months gone by. There are not many such in life so sweet that men part with them with pain, that they would be

willing, if they could, to put back the shadow on the dial-plate of time, and live them over again and yet again. They do not often stand looking into the past, longing, with a longing too deep for words, that, of those uncounted hours ever hurrying away, *one* might return, look them once more in the face, live with them in their life again.

But though from Leonard this hour passed away, never to be repeated—for no second meeting, dear though it might be, could be quite like this—yet as he parted from Janet at the door of the Priory House and turned homewards once more, the rich promise of the future drew forward his thoughts to the fulness of life that lay still before him.

When he went out again that night, the earth was all wrapped up close in a pure white robe of fleecy snow. The outstretched arms of the pines and cedars in the wood and park were bowed beneath their crystal loads. The stars were sparkling through the frosty air, Orion with his glittering belt, the clustering Pleiades, the Great Bear twisting his unwieldy

bulk around the Polar star. And, while the equinoctial winds were yet raging through the Marton woods, making the branches of even the sturdy oaks to creak and strain in the blast, he took Janet for his wife.

Notwithstanding Jessie Lee's prediction, it was a very quiet day in Marton after all. There were no oxen roasted whole, no hogsheads of ale tapped, no feast made for all who chose to come. Nor were there flags flying, nor flowers scattered on the path of the bride, nor arches wreathed with evergreens, beneath which the new-made Lady of the Manor might pass as she came out of church.

The wedding bells ringing out in the morning from the ivied tower told the news first to almost every one in the village. For Leonard's old proud sensitive reserve swayed him still. The people should have festivities and rejoicings to their hearts' content when he brought home his wife to the Hall. The new agent, little Miss Gale's nephew, received instructions to commence preparations forthwith. But this great joy of his was too sacred to be paraded before even the little

public of Marton. It was his own, his and Janet's, for they were one, and belonged to none beside.

And Janet too would have it so. She wanted nothing to distract her thoughts when she took upon her solemnly her triple vows of reverence, obedience, and love. The gaze of even kind admiring eyes would, she felt, disturb her then. So with only Alison and her father to attend her, she went quite early through the plantation to the church, while the Marton labourers were going back from their breakfasts to their work. She wore no ornaments, only a simple morning dress. The wedding-ring with which Brian Clyde, while she was still a girl, had married her, she had taken off. She could not bear that the one which by-and-bye Leonard would put on her hand, should have its consecration marred by the touch of this.

The Canon was to marry them. He was always the "Canon" to the Marton people. They never learned quite easily, often as he came among them, to call him "Bishop." There was no change to be seen upon him, and they liked him by his old name best. It was a sunshiny

morning. I should have been sorry, and so would you, reader, I daresay, if it had been otherwise; and inside the church, the grey walls and the worn pavement and the black oak timbers looked almost gay, dashed over with crimson, gold and blue, as the light streamed through the stained glass upon them.

And there, before God and man, shrined round with the purple glory that fell upon her through the chancel window, Janet gave herself to Leonard, and he took her for his own, through life till death to be his wife.

Jessie Lee's marriage, which took place just after Lady day, as soon as Reuben had left the Haxby farm, was attended with tenfold more fuss and commotion. Indeed, Mrs. Leaf, who, with not a few others, had seriously disapproved of the proceedings of the squire, would not have considered that the ceremony was at all properly performed, unless half Marton had been present in the church to admire the handsome bridegroom and the pretty little bride.

And they were there too. Even Mr. Winsley slipped in on the sly, and being found out in what

he had done, incurred a reprimand on his return from his wife, who not only held in her own hands the reins of domestic government, but, unfortunately for him, the whip also, which latter she not unfrequently applied, figuratively speaking of course, to the ears of her delinquent lord.

It really was a sight worth going to see. Everybody said so, and of course everybody must be right. As to the bride, Miss Gale declared she was a perfect picture. It was not often that the little maiden lady was at a loss how to express her feelings, but on this occasion she fairly broke down in the attempt to find something to compare her to. She thought, with her fair face and her golden hair, she looked like a lily dressed in sunbeams, only that there was nothing in a lily to match the roses that were blushing on Jessie's cheeks, as she came down the aisle between the high black pews with Reuben by her side.

And such a wedding dinner too, and wedding tea, and wedding supper, as they had at the mill! For Roger Lee's house was not a quarter big enough to hold all the people that were to come,

so they were obliged to do the feasting in the great parlour at the mill, and even that was hardly large enough. There was no end of the good things there were to eat; indeed, for weeks beforehand the preparations had been going on, and the dairy and larder being filled by degrees with all sorts of country fare, there was hardly anything you could mention, belonging to the higher branches of the culinary art, which Mrs. Leaf had not provided. And, with the exception perhaps of herself and the bride, it was astonishing what excellent appetites the company brought with them to the feast. One might imagine they had been fasting for a week that they might be equal to the task that now devolved upon them. As Mrs. Leaf remarked, it was really quite a pleasure to see how every one "reached-to" and made themselves at home when they got fairly started eating. "If there was one thing more than another that she couldn't bear, it was to provide the best of everything, and plenty of it too, and then for folks to pick at their meat as if they was so many chickens."

And everybody talked too, which was another load off her mind. It looked as if they were enjoying themselves as well as their victuals. And so as they all did admire Jessie, too—and Reuben as well, though, of course, even if he was her son, Mrs. Leaf was free to own that at a wedding it was only right that people should notice the bride the most. And she certainly did think herself no one could beat Jessie for beauty, as she sat all smiles and blushes by Reuben's side. She was more to look at by a good piece than Miss Margery Bradshaw—who was Mrs. Ralph Burton now, and had grown quite stout since her marriage—had ever been.

Then there were healths to drink, and Mr. Leaf made a speech, and so did Reuben, and Farmer Brighouse, and Mr. Gale, the new agent, who was quite a gentleman, and graced the party considerably, Mrs. Leaf considered. But they none of them said very much, though they all got through pretty easily, and as Miss Gale, who was present, remarked, didn't make any one uncomfortable for fear they should stick fast and not be able to go on properly to the end.

Roger Lee, too, had to make a speech when the bride's health was drunk, and if the others had been short he made up for it. Indeed, he seemed, when he had once begun, as if he would not be likely to give over until he had got the length of a sermon.

He was sorry to part with Jessie, he said, for she was like daylight itself at home, but then he knew it was what girls must come to some time; and he couldn't have given her into better keeping than Reuben Leaf's. She would make a good wife, he was sure; and he'd no doubts but what Reuben would make as good a husband too. "He didn't know which on 'em had made the best bargain, but he thought each on 'em had done as well or better nor what the other had, and he couldn't say no more nor that. An' now that they'd got started hand in hand, to go along t' same track in life, he hoped they'd help one another along, an' be all t' better, each on 'em, for being together. They each on 'em wanted summut as t' other could give. A woman mostly wanted a bit o' strength an' courage putting intil her. She were over-weak and sappy with herself, an'

she mun larn it from her husband. An' a man," he went on to say, "mostly wants to be made a bit lovinger and tender-hearted, an' to think less about making hissel' comfortable, an' gettin t' best of everything, an' he'll have to go to his wife to larn him that. I never reckons owt," he said, "of a man as hasn't a bit o' the woman in him, nor much of a woman as hasn't a bit o' the man in her. An' when young folk gets married, that's part o' what they've got to do. They've got each on 'em to grow summut like t' other. They'll have to rub a bit, mebby, first, but nobbut they bring love with them they'll get smoothed together by-an-bye."

"An' others," said Roger, and here his eyes twinkled a little as he looked across to where Marget sat, comely, grey, and placid, "when they've tewed together up the hill, and are tottering down hand in hand to t' bottom, and t' bairns is grown up, all on 'em, an' married, an' sided out o' t' house, and the two old folks sits down by their fireside with nobbut theirselves again—same as me an' Marget, an' Mr. Leaf here an' his missis—why, then, t' latter end 'll be

better than the beginning, an' like them as went to t' marriage at Cana, they'll drink their good wine t' last. An' noo, here's health an' happiness to 'em both, and to t' Squire too, for it wouldn't be manners to be putting werselves afore him. An' noo that he's gotten wed an' come back among us, may he live long, him an' his wife, to be Master o' Marton, an' God's blessing be wi' 'em all. An' noo I'll sit down, for I've spoke over long already."

THE END.

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